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THE NINETEEN-TWENTIES

LITERATURE AND IDEAS IN THE POST-WAR DECADE

BY

A. C. WARD



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THE SPIRIT OF THE 'TWENTIES

AUTHOR'S NOTE

THIS book is both a review of literature in the nineteen-twenties and a free fantasia on contemporary themes. I have attempted to set down some part of what was thought and felt about books and affairs by one man who shared in the experiences of the post-War generation and was glad to be alive in it.

In the first chapter, through a summary of events and discontents, an endeavour is made to trace the development of the mood of despair which appears to me to be the unifying principle in literature and ideas between 1920 and 1930. Throughout, my main purpose has been to stimulate interest in the books discussed, and to provoke readers to form their own independent judgments when they have not already done so. It is scarcely necessary to point out that Chapter XI mentions only a small handful of those who, since the War, have written on the subjects named. Obviously no inkling of modern scientific development could be given in a dozen pages, but if (as I hope) non-scientific readers will turn to Eddington and Whitehead, and from them to others, they will find that science and philosophy can be made as pleasurable as and more satisfying than fiction.

I am regretfully conscious that I have also omitted to say anything of So-and-So and So-and-So, whose stories, poems, plays, and essays I warmly admire; but as I am convinced that, in such a book, selection is more desirable than collection, I refrain from rectifying these omissions.

A. C. WARD

MARTYR'S GREEN, SURREY
July 1930

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I like the men and women of my age,
I like their hardness,
For though we are a battered and rather bitter set
Still we have faced the facts, we have been pretty honest.
But sitting here brooding over the hard faces,
I wonder if we have not rejected too much,
If we have not hardened ourselves too much,
Making it impossible to break out of our self-prisons. . . .

Richard Aldington : 'The Eaten Heart'

THE NINETEEN-TWENTIES

CHAPTER I

A DECADE OF DESPAIR

§ 1—*Diagnosis*

HISTORY can be written only at a distance from the matters it seeks to record; therefore history, in the full sense, cannot be written at all. (We do not know the truth about the past; we are too far from it to catch the tones and sensations of actual living. Nor do we know the truth about the present, because of our own opaque prejudices, illusions, and desires.) The difficulty of writing history was less when historians were content to register certainties—'lists of dates and facts'; but the more recent quest of 'the living past' has given us, in mass production, a series of illusions of the past dressed in the shape of the historians' own predilections. From history according to Macaulay and Green and Freeman we have passed to history according to Belloc and Chesterton; to history political, rationalistic, pacifist, militaristic; history with a class bias; and history with so complete an absence of bias as to be bloodless and lifeless.

Since the World War ended, a thousand writers have set down their impressions of the conflict, and a thousand more have declared the falsity of those impressions. Already the truth about the War has been told so often by eye-witnesses whose accounts are mutually destructive that history in the future must, as plain history always has done in the past,

confine itself to the bare bones of event—sacrificing the spirit that made the deed for the form of the deed itself.

When the time comes to attempt a formal history of the nineteen-twenties, the sensations experienced by those who lived in that decade will be no more recoverable than the scent of last year's flowers. Yet to the people of the nineteen-twenties, as to those of each generation, the sensation of living was everything, the common denominator of fact nothing. History may say of those ten years that it was the time of the Bloodless War and of the Silent Revolution; but of what it felt like to participate in that war and that revolution, the future will know little more than we who are now alive may set down.

The Bloodless War began as soon as the armies of exhausted men and women had stored, once again, sufficient reserves of mental strength and energy to fight against the threatened wastage of all they had been persuaded to sacrifice in the World War. Not more than a few months were needed for the first wave of disillusion to reach its crest, as a consequence of the realization that political chicanery was still a force in public affairs, and that the spirit of *camaraderie* loudly encouraged during the War had not changed the heart of mankind nor deeply affected human relations. It was folly, perhaps, to expect that the post-War world would be different from the pre-War world so far as the fundamentals of character were concerned; yet that had been a persistent hope among thousands in the armies. Whatever horror or cynicism or boredom the soldiers might suffer, there was the confident expectation that their own countrymen and countrywomen would not forget, and that one or other of the Utopian catchwords of the Wartime politicians and publicists would prove to have some near relation to actuality. If there was to be a world safe for democracy and homes fit for heroes; if the War, however terrible and disgusting, was really to end war; if a league of nations for-

the preservation of peace was established on a basis of honest intention and trust—if these desirable ends had been achieved, few of the millions who took part in the War would have become embittered in the years that followed. But because none of these ends was achieved, because there was little evidence of a will to achieve such ends among those who ruled the post-War world, a whole generation became involved in the desperate Bloodless War between the Contents and the Not-Contents.

Even at the end of the nineteen-twenties it was still unapparent to multitudes of the Contents that any important campaign was in progress against them, just as it was unapparent to as large a number that, in other ways, a Silent Revolution had been effected. The terms used here are neither too strong nor too definite to describe the changes in religion and morals (and in some measure in politics also) that came about in the nineteen-twenties. Is it extravagant to suggest that at no time since Constantine made it an official religion has Christianity been so seriously shaken as in the years since the War? As the pendulum swings back, orthodoxy may be fully restored, though there is no present ground for confidence that it will be. The weakening of Christian belief inevitably weakened, also, the traditional regard for authority in both personal and public government; and so long as in religion there is endless variety of conviction and non-conviction, there will be small likelihood of the acceptance of any common standard of moral values—and an equally diminished likelihood of any further respect for Parliament than the minimum it is able to exact through its legal machinery.

But none that thinks more than casually can contemplate without concern and unrest the vital weakening of authority. Few men and women have advanced so far along the problematic road of evolution as to impose upon themselves voluntarily the degree of self-discipline necessary to make

them bearable to themselves or endurable as members of a community. Until that necessary point of self-discipline is reached, conformity to some external system of discipline is essential. In the post-War generation the process of overthrowing authority was so swiftly accelerated that youth was swept off its feet, and either drifted, with no sense of direction, or threw out its hands to clutch whatever promised immediate stability. For such reasons, in a generation of unparalleled scepticism, the Roman Catholic Church experienced an amazing revival. Rome offers immediate spiritual stability to those who have lost their footing and are unable to generate within themselves a new metaphysical consciousness. It is intensely difficult to be a complete sceptic, a confident and happy nothingarian, in either religion or politics. Discovering this with more than a little dismay, many in the modern generation have shown an extraordinary tolerance of freak sects and parties. Bored by the idea of the traditional objective Heaven, they are experimenting with a variety of still more intangible conceptions, which promise less and will almost certainly fulfil much less even than they promise.

There remain, however, considerable numbers who have shed the old beliefs without adopting alternatives. These are convinced of the bankruptcy of existing constitutions; they are sceptical not only of all in authority but also of all who aim at authority. They offer no remedy because they have trust in none. They are only spectators and critics of life, with an intense individualistic conviction that it is both dangerous and unwarrantable to attempt to arrange the lives of other people—and every system of religion and politics is planned to arrange other people's lives in conformity with a common design. They are tolerant of modern civilization only in so far as it safeguards the individual person from oppression by others; they are intolerant of it in so far as its persistent tendency is to

standardize the human mind and spirit according to a pattern which pleases the majority, however unintelligent or base.

But whether the revolutionaries have exchanged one set of beliefs for another, or have turned to complete scepticism, the Silent Revolution was one of the chief events of the nineteen-twenties, and history will require to take account of it. Though unbelief is no new phenomenon, its manifestation in the post-War world has differed from that in previous generations. Christianity and orthodox morality were safe so long as they were either accepted as valid or attacked as oppressive: in both cases they were acknowledged as existing and potent forces. The newer method, of ignoring both Christianity and orthodox morality and of regarding belief and conduct as a purely personal issue so long as it does not impinge upon the liberties of others, is more difficult to counter. All that the Church can do is to suggest divine displeasure—of which, often, no sign is visible to human eyes. The error of the nineteenth-century aggressive rationalists was that they gave strength to their adversaries by attacking them. Passive moral and spiritual disobedience, as at present practised, make it much more difficult for the adversary to assume heroic stature.

§ 2.—*The Bloodless War*

Though it would never occur to the members of any good team to follow a victory by squabbling as to which individual member had won the game, the nations composing the Allied armies in the World War engaged in ten years and more of sporadic wrangling around the question of who won the War. Any one of the countries concerned might easily have lost the War, but only their united strength could end it—for, as later events proved, it was *ended* rather than *won*. No war is won until all its remote

consequences are resolved. Military success followed by national impoverishment and moral bankruptcy can only be described as victory if that word is used in a spirit of tragic fantasy; whereas disaster on the battle-field, if it preludes the recovery of a nation's moral force and productive energy, may be the most fruitful of victories. This is a lesson history has often taught but the world has never learned. The sudden fever of a victory in arms coming after a long period of debility heroically endured was unfortunate for Britain. She had poured out her vital forces perhaps more prodigally than any one of her allies, and later was to incur undeserved odium among those allies because in their service she had made herself a financial buffer-State between America and continental Europe, giving guarantees her European friends were then unable to give. This was one of the circumstances which, for years after 1918, made her home finances narrowly straitened and caused her to carry a burden of taxation such as could not have been conceived even in a nightmare before the War. Hardly was the War at an end when the labour market became congested with hundreds of thousands of workless, for whom financial provision had to be made from the already heavily-drained public purse. A huge proportion of the workless were ex-soldiers, who not only returned in a vast number of instances to permanent idleness and penury, but also found themselves compelled to bear ignominious insult.

Through four years the soldiers had been 'beloved Tommies', credited with undying courage and every virtue. Once the panic was over, the 'beloved Tommies' became, in the mouths of their one-time sentimental and hysterical admirers, loafers and lazy wastrels concerned only to draw 'the dole' (unemployment benefit paid by the State). Political extremists were quick to seize upon this fuel of disillusion and distress, which promised a first-class blaze in

the interests of world-wide Communism. The possible upheaval was averted, partly by the personal influence of Douglas Haig (whose abilities as a military leader are more in dispute than his genuine concern for the post-War welfare of the disbanded armies), partly by the abundant and peculiarly British compound of humour and inertia. But if the fires of resentment failed to blaze, they did not cease to smoulder, and the smoke from this source was perhaps the main contributory cause of the mood of militant despair which settled upon the country, and throughout the labour troubles of the nineteen-twenties, frequently threatened to turn the Bloodless War into a terribly bloody one. Class was now once again ranged against class, with whatever added ugliness class-consciousness wantonly inflamed in the camps both of the extreme right and of the extreme left could give to an always ugly passion. Nearly every Wartime pledge given by the politicians was passed over as inexpedient, with the exception (chiefly) of the promise of adult suffrage; and, where women were concerned, even that promise was fulfilled piecemeal and reluctantly. Increasing dissatisfaction with the older political parties led in 1924 to the formation of the first Labour Government in Britain, with a minority in Parliament. This administration lasted less than a year, but returned to office in 1929 with increased strength in the Commons.

The country had now tried all the party-leaders, but its principal problems were still unsolved, and the mood of despair deepened.

What is here described as despair must not be interpreted as a sense of defeat. Some such sense was present in certain quarters—yet chiefly among those who, while claiming to be the country's best friends, were continually prophesying evil. The prevalent mood of despair, with its abandonment of false hope, stimulated in many the determination to

carry on with whatever work was at hand, even though leaders failed to lead. No true history of the nineteen-twenties can be written unless historians are aware that numerous alert and active-minded people had got rid not only of what Bernard Shaw calls 'the bribe of heaven' but also of the bribe of hope. That is the imperishable strength they draw from their despair—the readiness to work productively without desiring even such reward as hope offers.

The conduct of affairs abroad had a more than secondary influence upon the mind of Britain. The Anglo-Irish war (inadequately called the civil war) in the southern provinces of Ireland was conducted on both sides with savagery that only fanaticism can explain or excuse. Yet these savages were often ordinary young men of culture whose like can be met in offices, banks, drawing-rooms, and at good-class dinner-tables. They were fighting for a cause in the service of which they were prepared to give anything and do anything. Their end was partially gained when the Irish Free State was set up with a parliament in Dublin, though the Irish negotiators of the treaty still had months of nationalist rebellion and assassination to deal with; and they dealt with their difficulties more rigorously than ever the English had in similar circumstances.

The most spectacular and promising result of the War was the establishment of the League of Nations with headquarters at Geneva. Woodrow Wilson, the United States President, was the prime mover in framing the Covenant of the League, but this peace parliament of the nations received its first setback when America repudiated Wilson and elected to remain outside the League in order to avoid being drawn into European affairs. In later years, however, America made more substantial endeavours after world-peace than some prominent members of the League, which, nevertheless, intervened several times to prevent threatened outbreaks between minor Powers, and transacted with credit a vast

amount of work making for international humanitarianism and social betterment. Yet, despite the Solemn Covenant and the subsequent treaties by which it was buttressed, the League has not so far secured universal confidence, even among people who passionately desire its success. National jealousies are still so strong that, in another world-crisis, the lack of the will-to-peace in any one quarter might disrupt the whole structure of the League, notwithstanding the safeguarding pacts and alliances. With their own interests at stake, few of the great Powers would be ready to accept dictation from the League of Nations; and one or two leading European countries carry an air of unreality into their deliberations in the League Assembly. They appear to suffer the League with mild tolerance rather than to support it with enthusiasm.

A severe strain was set upon the faith of those who hoped much from the League, by the exclusion from the range of its powers, in the first years of the peace, of important matters affecting the welfare of Europe. France, torn and bleeding after the four years' struggle, and with never-dulled memories of her humiliation following the Franco-Prussian war of 1870, was disinclined to lift her heel from the neck of Germany. She gave every indication of wishing to cripple Germany permanently. This was to some extent due to genuine fear and shock, but partly, also, to unapologetic vindictiveness—understandable in the circumstances, but alarming in England and to the English spirit—though not to English militarists and their newspapers, who look upon mercy and fear as one. Determined that Germany should have no loophole of escape from the utmost fulfilment of her treaty obligations, France (led by Poincaré and Clemenceau) kept for years an inflexible grip upon the occupied territories of the Rhineland, and even extended her original area of occupation by bringing the Ruhr valley under French military control in 1923. At the same time,

relations between France and England became more unstable than could have been thought possible five years earlier, except by those who had observed how little love was lost between the leaders of the two countries on several occasions during the War period. In the eyes of a large section of English people the French occupation of the Ruhr came as a blow against those ideals of even-handed justice for which they believed the War had been fought. It seemed that the sabre-rattling of Germany had been quieted only that the heel-stamping of France might be heard, and the later brand of militarism was as hateful as the first.

Had the War, then, been fought in vain? Was the post-War world no different (except in poverty and pain) from the pre-War world? That there should be any occasion to ask such questions was the worst shock that idealism had suffered since Wartime illusions shrivelled. The tide of disillusion was constantly rising higher: In Britain—multitudes without work and without proper housing; labour unrest and political ineptitude. In America—apparently overwhelming prosperity, and aloof contempt of 'the old gang' in Europe. In France—fear and hatred and a disposition toward dangerous political intrigues with the small 'new' nations of eastern and south-eastern Europe. In Austria and Hungary—hordes of starving children (the flotsam of war) and complete bankruptcy. In Italy—first anarchy and then the dictatorship of Mussolini and the Fascisti. In Russia . . . ?—no one outside Russia appeared to know. Some observers reported a terrorist hell, others a new golden age; the rest reserved judgment.

The War had been fought that 'freedom might not perish from the earth'. Britain still enjoyed freedom, it is true; but freedom more limited than before 1914. The Defence of the Realm Act was retained in operation for

years, and employed by successive governments with the petty interfering mania and mean persecuting spite of a soured and impotent spinster.

Most of these irritations, disappointments, and distresses had been endured in Britain with a minimum of protest, when, early in 1929, the avalanche of War-books began. The possibility of such a visitation of wrath had been foreshadowed seven years earlier with the publication of C. E. Montague's *Disenchantment*. That book was read and admired as much for its distinction of style as for its strong yet moderated protest—so well moderated as to seem scarcely more than good-mannered indignation. Later books by Montague—*Fiery Particles* and *Rough Justice*—were more definitely anti-War—the first ironically, the other tragically. But still his literary urbanity softened the attack. These were books for connoisseurs rather than for the multitude. What Montague had done for a few, Erich von Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* did for millions throughout Europe and America and beyond. Consideration of Remarque's story as literature and as pacifist propaganda belongs to a later chapter of this book. Comment is here confined to its effect, strengthened in Britain by the independent evidence of Richard Aldington in *Death of a Hero*, which came out late in 1929. Both these books proclaimed that the War had been fatal to a whole generation of youth by inflicting death either morally or spiritually, or both, even when it had spared the fighters' bodies. The degree of over-emphasis in both books would have been noted by the majority of intelligent readers, and would have served to limit their influence, if the apologists for war had had the good sense to reserve their fire. But, in concentrated fury, an attack upon the veracity of Remarque and Aldington broke out, and led to the worst public display of bad manners that this generation is likely to see. The controversy served only to stimulate the production of

War-books for the next twelve months, and the attacks made against them seemed often to be based upon attempts to refute charges which the authors of the War-books had in fact not made. It was declared that the War-books gave only personal views of the War and did not paint the whole picture; yet it is clearly implicit (where not actually stated) in most of them that no pretence was made of giving other than a personal view. The real gravamen of the attack lay in the covert suggestion that the individual soldier's view of the War was irrelevant and unimportant. But the individual soldier may justly hold that his own single view of the War is as relevant and important to himself and some others near to him as the impersonal view of the *generalissimo* or of the academic historian. This attitude in the controversy is even more legitimate than it might be if the promises and hopes of the war-makers had been fulfilled. As it was, the individual ex-soldier found himself living in a rather worse world than he lived in in June 1914; he naturally felt, therefore, that he had been 'sold', and that whatever sacrifice he and the others made was useless. His attitude may have been altogether wrong, but it is understandable and worthy of attention. There is certainly no reason for wonder if, in his disgust, he inclined to brood upon the misery of his own narrow but intense experience. And there is little reason for wonder, either, if he suspected that the attacks upon War-books had sometimes come either from those who have a vested interest in war, or from those who, regarding war as the noblest of blood-sports, are as disgusted by protests against war as they are by protests against fox-hunting.

The affair of the War-books was the culminating episode in that Bloodless War between the Contents and the Not-Contents which divided the post-War generation into two camps as definitely as the Gospel divided Christian from pagan in the first century.

§ 3.—*The Silent Revolution*

Divorce Court judges and others disturbed by the decay of religion and by changed standards of sexual morality, sometimes call the modern generation to order by insisting that the euphemism 'misconduct' shall not be used for adultery; and that an offending woman shall be called a harlot. Such insistence upon strictly biblical terms in a court which concentrates upon immorality is more quaint than serviceable to orthodoxy, and clearly indicates that judicial purists are still lingering in the last century and are incompetent to deal with current moral problems, however apt they may be in the administration of civil law. Illicit relations are not nowadays (if they ever were) prevented by the use of verbal bludgeons. If orthodoxy is to reassert itself it must first learn to comprehend the minds of wrong-doers and to understand their attitude.

The main obstacle to the re-establishment of former standards of conduct is that behaviour to-day is more often based upon settled personal conviction than upon either conventional habit or unconventional naughtiness. Faith in religion and in human authority was fatally injured by the War: first, because millions of men and women found it impossible to reconcile the horrors of war with what they had been taught to believe of God; second, because they could not stomach the apologetics of the Churches, which (however the fact might be explained or disguised) made religion secondary to military expediency; third, because they discovered before long that leadership (both in the army and the State) had lost whatever directive power it might ever have possessed and was wandering in a frenzied maze of improvisation. The straying sheep looked up but were not led.

These disillusioning discoveries would have had fewer

moral consequences if conduct had been made to depend, in the past, less upon the hope of rewards and the fear of penalties. Once its divine authority had become questionable, the Church was unable to hold its own even as a social institution; and the sexual morality taught by the Church began to appear more as a matter that might be governed by simple personal hygiene than by inexorable laws of the Deity. Here, again, the Roman Catholic Church had the advantage of other denominations, by insisting upon its apostolic authority and by being comminatory while the others were only explanatory or apologetic. Even now religion might recover much of its lost ground if it first set up a backbone and then called its one-time followers to turn and repent and so to flee from the wrath to come. Even though that wrath may not seem likely, there are still many who would hesitate to declare against the voice of the Church that there is *no* wrath to come. There is evidence, indeed, that wrath does come to punish human folly and evil: the evidence of the War, for example.

The popularization of motor-cars and motor-cycles, coinciding with the decay of authority in Churches and families, gave to many thousands for the first time in the nineteen-twenties that freedom of movement which is necessary for experimental unsanctioned relations between the sexes. There followed a widespread change of attitude in regard to marriage. Contraceptive devices removed the fear impulse which, combined with irresistible sexual curiosity, has often led to disastrous marriages. It would be erroneous to conclude that the institution of marriage is likely to be superseded by some system of unauthoritative personal contract. Civilized men and women have become so habituated to marriage that at least for generations to come it will continue to symbolize the desire for permanent union which is still the ideal of those to whom love means more than a casual physical relationship. Nevertheless,

experimental relationships are inherent in the newer system of morality in England, since the State penalizes the unhappily married through restrictive divorce laws, while it takes no official cognizance whatsoever of those who 'live in sin'. Two people who have 'lived in sin' for a period, and found their association a happy one, can regularize their union by subsequent marriage. If their association is unsuccessful they can separate (it may be with mutual respect and goodwill), without any taint of the odium which the Divorce Courts and the energies of the King's Proctor may impose upon two people whose only fault originally was that they were unable to live in harmony.

The increase of experimental free association, one of the main factors in present-day social life, undoubtedly has a dangerous aspect, inasmuch as no safeguarding sense of responsibility can be assured. But is an irresponsible marriage (and there are thousands such) less potentially reprehensible than an irresponsible liaison? Such questions as this need to be answered with judicial fairness if the cause of true morality is to be served, for it can only be served rightfully when common sense and the evidence of experience are brought to bear. How can disgust and despair in relation to marriage be other than prevalent when the Divorce Court lists are congested with the names of those seeking to escape from marriage? The remedy for despair in this direction is not to make divorce easier, but to make marriage more difficult. A crime is committed in unison by the Church and the State when ecclesiastical blessing and civil sanction are given to a union for which the contracting parties may be unprepared and unfitted. If the Church and the State consider themselves only formally concerned in the *making* of marriages, whence do they profess to derive authority to prevent the mutually agreed *breaking* of marriages—apart from a proper concern for the welfare of children?

The unpreparedness of authority to give other than stereotyped answers to legitimate questions from the modern young man and young woman has caused a general turning away in despair from these sources of authority, and a determination to depend only upon the guidance of conscience and common sense.

For the sake of convenience in statement, the word 'morality' has been used above in its narrow current connotation of sexual behaviour. This general limited use is unfortunate, both because it serves to give the sexual factor a disproportionate significance, and because it obscures other and equally important aspects of morality. A section of the newspaper Press is to some extent responsible for this distortion of moral values. In a number of English and American papers sexual irregularities are at once lewdly exploited and sanctimoniously censured. While attention is concentrated upon this one particular phase of morals, true morality is seriously impaired by those very same newspapers, which exert a degrading influence upon standards of public taste and decency. The vulgarity of the sensation-mongering Press is more destructive of national morals than all those half-imaginary 'sins of society' upon which the worst papers fatten like blow-flies on a corpse.

While civilization blatantly continues to suffer such monstrosities as newspapers at one and the same time running with the hare of adultery and hunting with the hounds of propriety; as a State which puts a premium on evasion of its cherished institution of marriage; as a society which sentimentalizes over its members when they are necessary soldiers and sneers at them for their enforced idleness when they are unnecessary civilians once more; as

an age which has forsaken the temple of Truth to worship at the shrine of the goddess Propaganda — while such spectacles are toward, it is not astonishing that despair should be rampant.

CHAPTER II

SAINT BERNARD AND THE ELDERS

§ 1.—*Bernard Shaw*

UNTIL youth became numerically exhausted by military enlistment and its after-consequences, the World War was fought (though not led) by the young. Immediately after the War, sincere idealists and scared septuagenarians began to blow the trumpets of youth and to proclaim that the younger generation must now be given its chance to share prominently in the direction of affairs. The trumpets were premature, for the majority of young adults still alive in 1919 had stepped straight from school into war activities of one kind or another, and had had no opportunity to cultivate the qualities and abilities necessary for reconstructing and controlling a world devastated by fury. Youth merely as youth has no total advantage over age merely as age: inexperience in the one is as heavy a handicap as ineptitude in the other. The post-War 'youth movement' failed to usher in the promised earthly paradise, for the same reasons as the enfranchisement of women failed similarly. In the first place because goodwill and good intentions are inadequate to compensate for lack of experience; in the second place because inborn conservatism persuades the greater part of humanity (including woman and youth) to prefer to follow in the wake of a tradition (even a discredited one) rather than to break into experimentation; in the third place because the emancipation of youth and of woman was illusory rather than actual: women and young people were 'free' on the implied condition that they did not too much disturb 'things as

they are'. Consequently, in cynical disillusion, disgust, or despair, many of the most promising minds among the newly enfranchised turned away from the business of Statecraft to engage in other activities.

Thousands of intelligent women opened teashops or started 'peasant art' businesses, and thus began a movement that is rapidly making England a second Switzerland, without either the natural or national characteristics of that country. Christabel Pankhurst (a former leader of the militant suffragists), proclaiming her despair, forswore politics and became a Second Advent preacher. In morals and in art (the one being a reflection of the other) the Silent Revolution absorbed energies which in more wisely ordered circumstances might have gone into the rebuilding of the State. Newly awakened interest in literary forms, and revised standards of social behaviour, to some extent diminished the authority of the established older writers in England. Two or three (Hardy, Bridges, Conrad) were by the nature of their work removed from the range of fluctuating tastes, but among the rest only Bernard Shaw displayed throughout the nineteen-twenties the power to keep abreast of current thought. The change which ten years had wrought in one direction might be estimated by reading or re-reading Stanley Houghton's *Hindle Wakes*. When this play was produced in 1912 Fanny Hawthorne was regarded as a daring moral revolutionary; by 1922 her attitude had become as much a matter of course as that of Nora Helmer in *A Doll's House*.

Commonsense about the War [1] was an infuriating document to the War-party, but as later events proved that in many ways Bernard Shaw's observations had been sound sense, he stood out at the end of the War with the distinction of having kept his head during the crisis. Yet, by 1920, there was a common impression that the old man was

[1] A pamphlet issued with the *New Statesman* (November 14, 1914).

played out—an impression some critics held to be confirmed, not removed, when *Back to Methuselah* was published in 1921. Much in this immense 'metabiological pentateuch' is magnificently irrelevant and much is maddeningly garrulous, though both the irrelevance and the garrulity are the conversational overflow of a genius—if a tired genius. The only excuse for writing any piece of literature at uncommon length is that it was impossible to write it more compactly without losing something essential. That excuse cannot be made for *Back to Methuselah*: the whole argument (acknowledging its real importance) could have been presented in five or fewer short scenes. Apart from the interest of the argument and the pleasure of some fine prose there is nothing—no ordered development of story, no characters with a life outside the argument. The pentateuch is more flatulent to read than to see and hear, for the reason that Bernard Shaw talk is continuously attractive to listeners who are able to find excitement in ideas. If *Back to Methuselah* could be heard through in an evening, its flatnesses might matter very little; but as, on account of its length, it will probably not be heard at all in the future, there is some reason for complaining that it is a perverse freak of genius, and for pleading that what is important in it should be compressed into a revised version playable in three hours. The main argument in *Back to Methuselah* is tragically sound: that in the present ordering of life man is due to die almost before he has learned to live. The suggested remedy—that the duration of life should be extended—is, in principle, not entirely fantastic (already vital statistics speak of an actual increase in the average length of life); but there is nothing in the last three parts of *Back to Methuselah* to indicate that longer life would be worth while.

Shaw's services to the twentieth century include the imposition of a healthy restraint on that romantic make-

believe which was used in the past as a picturesque cloak to cover remediable evils—the 'heroism' of war to cover its murderous beastliness; the 'virtue' of charity to cover the infliction of poverty; the 'romance' of marriage to cover its serious and arduous duties. Having properly persuaded his converts to a more reasonable view of war, poverty, marriage, and much else, he is now disinclined to become a party to their getting any sort of fun from life, lest they fall into other toils of the siren Romance. Except that he has done further splendid work since *Back to Methuselah*, that play might be used to support a plea that the time had come for Bernard Shaw the reformer to cease reforming, lest he fall into the temptation that waits for all his kind—to make reform a continuous habit, instead of an occasional necessity. The long-livers in *Back to Methuselah*, if they were to be made persuasive, should have been allowed experiences irresistibly more attractive than any we short-livers enjoy. But they are, in fact, a dismal crowd. Even the Ancients are concentrated essence of being (a kind of superhuman animated 'bovril'), not exalted, beautified creatures. There was never a Utopia less attractive than this romanceless, virtually loveless Eden, in which the end of being is to become bodiless—'to press on to the goal of redemption from the flesh, to the vortex freed from matter, to the whirlpool in pure intelligence'.[1] This denial of the body is indicative of a lifelong deficiency in Shaw's personal make-up, and of a flaw (serious for practical purposes) in the structure of his philosophy. No philosophy can be sound unless it starts from the assumption that man is One—a whole and not an assemblage of separable parts. To say, 'Such or such you shall become if you deny your body,' is to begin with a fallacy. The body will not be denied, except through mortification, which is the body's revenge. Exaltation of the mind was valuable in Shaw's

[1] Lilith's speech, end of Part V, *Back to Methuselah*.

work in the first stages, for he began at a time when mental life was at low tide so far as the great majority was concerned. But the contagion of mental asceticism, for which he has been in a measure responsible, has produced debility even in mind. The marked lowering of vigour and vitality of much recent English literature is a consequence of too much living on the mind. Shaw has recorded that he is one of the comparatively few people who have the advantage of entirely normal eyesight. Something more is needed. Neither the literature nor the life of a period can be sound in brain and limb unless there is also normal blood-pressure. A D. H. Lawrence is the necessary complement of a Bernard Shaw; and, actually, the Laurentian philosophy of sex is a reply to the Shavian philosophy of brain.[1] Though it is Lilith (in the most impressive passage in Shaw's plays) who speaks last in *Back to Methuselah* to commend the Ancients' reaching-out to a state of 'all life and no matter', the Ghost of Adam a few minutes earlier has made the wise comment, 'And now the fools have killed all the animals; and they are dissatisfied because they cannot be bothered with their bodies! Foolishness, I call it.'

Perhaps it is deplorable (though most certainly it is true) that Shaw is more inspiring when he is crying 'Woe unto Israel!' than when he is prospecting the earthly paradise. This is not to say that his function has been always and only to serve as a harbinger of ill and a destructive critic. It is a more than ordinary achievement to have convinced Israel, or some part thereof, that it *is* desolate; and to have persuaded, scolded, and goaded it to seek out a better country. If he fails to bring his generation into the promised land, the future must at least say of Bernard Shaw that he started them on a journey in determined search of it.

[1] See D. H. Lawrence: *A Propos of Lady Chatterley's Lover* (London, 1930), p. 22ff.

Whether its doctrine convinces or not, the *Guide* is a fine presentation of organized and co-ordinated argument and a splendid addition to literature. The final paragraph of the book should be carefully noted as one more reminder of Shaw's positive practical idealism, and as a proof that, though (as seen in the paragraph below) he shares the common despair about the present, he is not in a mood of defeat concerning the failure:

> A bitter cynicism has succeeded to transports of pugnacious hatred of which all but the incorrigibly thoughtless, and a few incurables who have been mentally disabled for life by the war fever, are now heartily ashamed. I can hardly believe that you have escaped your share of this crushing disillusion. If you are human as well as intelligent you must feel about your species very much as the King of Brobdingnag did when he took Gulliver in his hand as a child takes a tin soldier, and heard his boastful patriotic discourse about the glories of military history.[1]

The Apple Cart (1929) administered a shock to those admirers of Bernard Shaw who agreed with him without understanding him—without realizing, indeed, the essential fact that as a protestant in principle, he is necessarily a potential protestant always and in relation to everything. Most protestants protest against labels rather than against facts. A declared democrat may protest against the thing *called* autocracy more than against the behaviour that *is* autocracy; and he may never notice (or consider it disloyal to his party to seem to notice) if democracy in power should happen to become more tyrannous than the autocracy it has displaced. One of the ironies of recent political history is that movements born in a passion for liberty should have ended in doctrines of 'party discipline' as intolerable as any earlier system of political subjection. Democrats had assumed that Bernard Shaw could be counted

[1] § XL, p. 155.

upon to support Demos in office, independently of whether Demos showed himself fit for office when installed. Hence the shock given by *The Apple Cart*. King Magnus (perhaps the one really great character in Shavian drama) is compelled to use his sole remaining symbol of autocracy—the royal veto—as a weapon to defend his country against a demo-plutocratic Cabinet's tyrannical encroachments upon popular liberties and public safety. Notwithstanding Bernard Shaw's declaration, in the preface to the play, that his critics took *The Apple Cart* only at its suburban face-value, careful reading of the text does not remove the impression that he loaded the scales against the Cabinet by making its male members nincompoops unfit to be matched against the extraordinary brilliance of Magnus. In the original production this disparity of intellectual ability was emphasized by the actors' pompously absurd delivery, even when Proteus' and Boanerges' speeches seemed sound in substance. This is a pity, since the mental stature of the King is such that the best possible presentation of the opposite case should have been allowed: the contest would then have been magnificent. Magnus' speeches are often intensely moving on account of the sincerity and moral passion that fills them, though the greatest moments in *The Apple Cart* are given, not to the King, but to Lysistrata, the Power-Mistress. Her speech denouncing Breakages, Limited (an international organization to impede progress and encourage wholesale material destruction in the interests of embattled finance) has emotional force as well as searing moral and intellectual passion. Lysistrata's accusation is more than a speech in a play, it is an indictment of a sinister feature in present-day materialistic civilization, and its reception by audiences in the theatre was a confirmation of the essential truth of the charges made. Certain impressive 'incidentals' call for particular notice: the references in the last act to the Americanization of

Europe; the interlude between the King and Orinthia, the mistress with whom his relations are so 'strangely innocent'; and the opening dialogue between the two secretaries, Sempronius and Pamphilius. Sempronius describes his father as 'a Ritualist by profession, a Ritualist in politics, a Ritualist in religion: a raging emotional Die Hard Ritualist', to whom nothing was real until it was dressed up in ceremonial vesture; as a man who depended entirely upon outside appearances and had no trace whatever of interior personal life, so that in the end he perished of loneliness. Sempronius' father is a familiar figure in the world to-day—and he is as often a woman as a man. He is a symptom of a disease of modern civilization, the disease which surfeits men and women with artificial entertainment and makes them impotent to draw satisfaction from any natural source or from within themselves. Cease to entertain them—and they wither.

There is some mildly malicious amusement to be had from the suspicion that the 'strangely innocent relations' between Magnus and Orinthia are a veiled admission of Bernard Shaw's inability to 'handle' romantic love. But the subterfuge, if it is one, is profitable. A score of dramatists can write about romantic and 'guilty' passion; only one could write that interlude, and even Shaw had not previously produced such splendid high comedy. Orinthia is the personification (a perfectly magnificent one) of Shaw's old bugbear—romantic make-believe. She sees in her scheme for the divorce of the King and his subsequent re-marriage to herself the immediate promise of heaven, and she desires to grasp at it. Magnus, more imaginative, sees the hell of to-morrow and the day-after-to-morrow as Orinthia's husband, and prefers to stick to the Queen, Jemima (an 'old cabbage' to Orinthia), and to his 'jolly lumps of children'. The Shaw of this interlude is a more human Shaw than had appeared before; he at length

concedes that a man may be allowed romantic indulgences —on condition that he keeps them in their separate compartment where they cannot interfere with the daily routine of work and tea with the family. . . . Amid much sound sense in the interlude, the soundest is Magnus' dissertation upon the advisability of separating the differing sorts of people—the Jemimas and the Orinthias—whom one single person may succeed in liking but who suspect and fear one another. These more personal passages represent an extension of range and interest unique in a dramatist who had reached the age of seventy-three.

Shaw's really remarkable achievement in *The Apple Cart*, however, is his freshness of approach to problems of the moment (though not of a moment only), and the continuance, in changed circumstances, of his function as a healthy and stimulating irritant in the body politic of Western civilization.

§ 2.—*Wells; Bennett; Galsworthy*

Between 1920 and 1930 the three senior English novelists published little that is likely to take a permanent place in literature. Arnold Bennett's *Riceyman Steps* is the most probable (and possibly the only) candidate for the honour miscalled immortality. Galsworthy's *The Forsyte Saga*, though not issued in collected form until 1923, belongs in part to an earlier period; *A Modern Comedy* (1929) is relatively inferior.

H. G. Wells might have written in this period the most memorable novels of any of the three if he had not ceased to be a novelist. Had *The World of William Clissold* (1926) been published in non-fictional dress and called *The Intelligent Man's Guide to Almost Everything*, thousands of readers would have been saved the trouble of looking for 'a story', while the remainder could have put it down on their list

of 'serious' books and approached it with a determined non-fictional mind.

'We require in England a new scheme of classification for prose literature. The category of the novel has become a dumping-ground for nearly every kind of miscellaneous prose, and fiction of the modern kind must be at a disadvantage if it has to stand comparison with the kind of book produced during a century and a half by English novelists of repute. The earlier twentieth-century practice of embedding pamphlets and treatises in the heart of novels and plays could be defended, but the defence was no longer tenable when Wells finally abandoned the jam altogether and retained only the powder. The powder was very good, salutary, sometimes even palatable, powder; but it *was* powder without jam.' If a Federated Association of English Novelists would draw up an agreement in which they undertake to adopt some such system of nomenclature as the following, the path of both reviewers and readers would be made plainer:

'*Good stories*' to be called ROMANCES.

Imaginative presentations of events, situations, and people to be called NOVELS.

Discussions of recent affairs to be called COMMENTARIES.

Clinging with determination to that word *Commentaries*, let us regard H. G. Wells as the novelist who took the wrong turning. We miss from his novels in the nineteen-twenties any successor to his earlier gallery of notable and memorable people (though Mr. Preemby, in *Christina Alberta's Father*, might be added); and we miss, too, that ability to shape and organize a fictional narrative, which was formerly one of his chief qualities as a novelist. Though Wells' liberal theories concerning the scope of the contemporary novel

deserve full attention and respect, it would prevent expectation of what is not provided if *William Clissold* had been described on the title-page as 'A Commentary', instead of as 'A Novel at a New Angle'. These later books by Wells contain much thought that is important and interesting (though scarcely continuously interesting), and much right-hearted (if sometimes wrong-headed) planning for a future World-State. But the truth is that H. G. Wells the reformer was guilty of a major error in tactics when he exchanged the novelist's business for that of a Utopian drill-sergeant. He might have laughed us into Utopia; he will never fuss us into it. As an earnest Utopian drill-sergeant he is desperately troubled not only by flabby bodies but also by flabby minds and hearts and souls, as well as by muddled ones. Military drill-sergeants, of course, are not allowed to know anything about the minds of their squads; but Wells should be aware that English people regard it as their cherished prerogative to be happily muddled if not cheerfully flabby. The spectre of determined regimentation that perambulates the severe terraces of H. G. Wells' International State, makes the place fatally unattractive. Subordination of humanity to ideas in these later books has diminished his power to exert influence as well as his ability to give pleasure; and one consequence is that what recollection of his novels is retained is sometimes grotesquely trivial, for we incline to be almost pathetically grateful for any glimpse of humanity and human frailty. In *The Secret Places of the Heart* Martin Leeds develops a carbuncle. Retrospectively that carbuncle gleams for a reader like a cheerful lamp through a fog of seemingly endless talk. To have ideas is noble; to have carbuncles, human.

The irony of the situation is that Wells is haranguing a perverse generation which, though patently not unaware of its political, intellectual, and moral sickness, is none the

less sceptical of the utility and comfort of the vast, new, shining, hygienic international sanatorium planned by this physician of sick nations.' It is not an uncommon experience for people whom Shaw causes to feel that they 'must do something about it', to be so exasperated by Wells' manner that they determine not to do anything whatsoever toward putting the world right.

A further irony is that Wells' post-War novels become enthralling once the reader ceases either to seek for any organized fictional narrative or to concern himself with the practicability of the plans proposed for a new world-order. Enjoyment increases, that is to say, in direct ratio to the reader's neglect of the author's intention. For example: In the Open Conspiracy section of *William Clissold* [1] this paragraph appears:

> I think now I have made plain what I mean by Open Conspiracy. It is the simplification by concentration into large organizations of the material life of the whole human community in an atmosphere of unlimited candour. It is explanation and invitation to every intelligent human being to understand and assist. It is the abandonment of all reservation in the economic working of the world. It is the establishment of the economic world-state by the deliberate invitation, explicit discussion, and co-operation of the men most interested in economic organization, men chosen by their work, called to it by a natural disposition and aptitude for it, fully aware of its importance and working with the support of an increasing general understanding.

Not only is the meaning here more nebulous than plain, but there is such a concatenation of 'vile phrases' as could not have been expected from an author who was once a stylist and is a magnificent descriptive writer. Or does H. G. Wells in insisting (though quite unconvincingly) that 'William Clissold is a fictitious character', wish it also to be understood that he disclaims responsibility for Clissold's literary style?

[1] Vol. III, Book V, § 2 (page 629, 1926 edn.).

Once leave these matters of style and world-building on one side, however, there is pleasure in the contemplation of William Clissold as a cosmic mind, and a more attractive could seldom be found. Clissold's diagnosis of civilization in the last half-century or more is excellently done. If there are newspapers in the Elysian Fields written and edited by angel-journalists—earnest, truthful, incorruptible, intelligent, enthusiastic, non-party—those neswpapers, ideal in their kind, might very well be like most part of *The World of William Clissold.*

Neither John Galsworthy nor Arnold Bennett has carried forward the English novel technically; they have consolidated it on its Victorian foundations and tidied it up. Bennett's (partial) naturalism and his extreme care for craftsmanship seemed new before the War, though, in fact, Dickens was (when he wished) a naturalist in fiction before Naturalism had been isolated as a theory instead of being just one way of writing employed by an author when he happened to want to write in that way. (And, on the whole, this is the common-sense manner in which Arnold Bennett, also, uses the naturalistic method). It is gradually sinking into the general literary consciousness that though Dickens was often a slapdash writer, he was also, often, extremely careful and exact. Certain descriptions of squalid places in *Oliver Twist* are marked by no less fidelity than Bennett's already classic description of Riceyman Square. Bennett 'evens out' his material more tidily than Dickens did, being unembarrassed by any such immense creative exuberance as possessed Dickens; and his work is not supercharged (as Dickens' was) with the theatrical, the romantic-pathetic, and the picturesque. Galsworthy has still less Dickensian fecundity than Bennett, and in place of romantic pathos employs tight-lipped pity (both equally near, perhaps, to sentimentalism).

The writings of Bennett and Galsworthy are monuments

of traditionalism, whereas Wells is an innovator. He may have led the English novel towards chaos, but certainly he has *led* it, and prevented its petrifaction. After the experimenters have done their worst and order has been restored, the English novel will undoubtedly find itself with a more flexible constitution, able to take in more of man's interior life than under the nineteenth-century dispensation. With Bennett and Galsworthy the English novel reached its terminus in one direction.

Conjoined with Galsworthy's technical orthodoxy[1] there is a psychological inquisitiveness and a sense of social injustice and drifting which gave *The Forsyte Chronicles*[2] their chief importance. This record of forty years in the history of upper-middle-class England (roughly 800,000 words long) never loses step, in spite of signs of tiredness and flagging in the final trilogy. The *Saga* has more value than the *Comedy*, due to the author's farther distance from his material; and by enabling him to see his concerns in better proportion and clearer perspective, this distance ensures balanced and judicial conclusions. By the half-way stage reached at the close of the *Saga*, Soames, who was in the beginning strongly antipathetic, is seen in a mellow glow and no longer in the raw light of the earliest pages. If the first trilogy had been written in mid-Victorian times it might have been called *The Forsyte Saga, or Nor so Bad as They Seemed*; while *A Modern Comedy* might have had for sub-title *Rather Worse than They Ought to Be.* In the *Comedy* Galsworthy has allowed his customary judicial calm to become flustered by more than a trace of peevishness toward the new generation. The only philosophic attitude to adopt toward the people of any one generation

[1] The later Galsworthy plays are less orthodox, technically, than the novels.

[2] *The Forsyte Chronicles* comprise *The Forsyte Saga, On Forsyte Change*, and *A Modern Comedy*.

is to regard them as 'not so bad as they seem'. It is disconcertingly unphilosophic of Galsworthy to write that the England of 1926 was 'going round and round like a kitten after its tail, muttering: "If only one could see where one wants to stop"'.[1] The cry of despair sent up by Galsworthy more than once in the *Comedy* is a cry coming from a man who has suffered himself to be deceived by appearances. If he could stand at as far a distance from 1926 as he now does from the late-Victorian period, he would probably see that England in that year was not chasing its tail more helplessly than in any other year. Younger people are privileged to be in despair about themselves and their time; but Galsworthy by taking appearances as realities seems not to have profited by the lesson of his own *Saga*—the lesson that change is the law of creation and that Time reconciles all things. Why does he fail to consider the younger generation with that philosophical equilibrium he had at length established in relation to the Victorians? Probably because the unifying theme of the whole chronicle is *The Decline and the Fall of the Forsytes*—the elbowing out of Old England by Young England. In 1886, when *The Man of Property*[2] begins, the English upper-middle-class was in full flower, immensely vigorous, immensely confident, sure of what it wanted, free from doubt as to its right to acquire and possess what it wanted; certain, too, of its right to retain what it acquired. The younger Soames was the type of unimaginative, possessive, self-centred Forsytism; yet Forsytism at its frequent best is Galsworthy's symbol of the backbone of England in the days when England had a backbone. The Forsytes were rooted in the English soil through their common ancestor, eighteenth-century Farmer Jolyon of Dorset. As the generations passed, to the original strength and soundness were added the refinements of

[1] Preface to *A Modern Comedy*.
[2] The first section of the *Saga*.

education and culture, until by the time they are met (1886) on the first page of the *Saga*, they represent the best of England in that generation—physically sound, mentally alert, receptive to the influences of culture and breeding. And yet, as can now be seen, the first page of *The Forsyte Saga* was the beginning of a last act. The Forsyte family was then already like a hero of ancient tragedy: it had risen to the height of prosperity and power, but it carried within itself the germ of its own decay. The strong Forsyte tree is 'flourishing with bland, full foliage, in an almost repugnant prosperity at the summit of its efflorescence.'[1] That almost repugnant prosperity is the germ of decay at the heart of the otherwise splendid tree of Forsytism, and Soames is most infected. When the *Saga* has run its course, hearty vigour has given way to a thin wail of diffidence and doubt. Old Sir Lawrence Mont walks through Whitehall, and, looking at the Cenotaph, says:

> Curiously symptomatic—that thing; monument to the dread of swank—most characteristic. . . . The fine, the large, the florid—all off! No far-sighted views, no big schemes, no great principles, no great religion, or great art—aestheticism in cliques and backwaters, small men in small hats.[2]

Twilight was upon the Forsytes, upper-middle-class England afflicted with chronic anaemia. Fleur, a typical Forsyte of the new generation, seen through the eyes of her exasperated lover, is 'a cold-blooded collecting little cat'—Fleur of the dead heart. Whatever has mortally chilled the younger generation, that mortal chilling strikes Galsworthy as its chief feature; the general distrust of emotion that causes Michael Mont to repeat to himself: 'Pity is tripe—pity is tripe! . . . Feeling is tosh! Pity is tripe!'

[1] *The Forsyte Saga*, Book I, Ch. I.
[2] *A Modern Comedy*, Book I, Part I, Ch. I.

CHAPTER III

MODERNIST ADVENTURES

§ 1.—*New Aims in Poetry*

UP to the early years of the present century the English and American imagination had shifted only occasionally and slightly from the traditional doctrine that All Art is Imitation—a classical theory to which the romantics had been, on the whole, more faithful even than the classicists. That part of the populace which has any interest in imaginative production, whether in literature or other forms, was fed for generation after generation on imitative art and, in consequence, had lost the ability to bring a flexible mind to the consideration either of the unusual or the usual. Except in a mystical sense, Blake was wrong in holding that 'the fool sees not the same tree that the wise man sees', though he was less wrong for his own century than for ours. Levelling-up processes, through schooling and related agencies, made it more and more unlikely that the fool would be permitted to retain his natural uniqueness of vision. The schoolmasters and the schoolmasters' masters spent their energies in an agony of desire to ensure that the fool should see exactly the same tree as the wise man sees; and it was not until the twentieth-century wave of universal scepticism came to its height, that the sublime fools—the artists—cut the apron-strings of the schoolmasters and their wise men, and so enabled art to get free from automatic submission to authority and tradition. Thenceforward, the theory of *Art as Imitation* was rivalled by the theory of *Art as Communication*; representational art (the copying of Nature or of Nature's

copyists) was challenged by the impudent competitor, non-representational art, which sought not to imitate nor to reproduce appearances, but to communicate (and therefore to *re-create*) the personal experience (sensation) of the artist when confronted by his object. In painting, the new manner had more or less established itself through Whistler (to some extent) and the French schools by the end of the nineteenth century; but literature followed more slowly, and changes were first clearly registered through modifications in verse-forms.

What fundamental difference was involved in the substitution of Art as Communication for Art as Imitation? Chiefly, the shifting of emphasis from the 'universal' to the personal. The ideal of universality in imaginative literature had dominated critical inquiry for a depressingly long time. A 'great' character in fiction had to be both John Brown and Everyman: as John Brown he could be 'sharply individualized' and as Everyman he was 'a universal figure'. A 'great' poem might start from a *unique* situation, but it was required that it should embody or symbolize some *universal* experience. Such expectations and demands were unexceptionable in relation to the work of geniuses, who do not, anyhow, care two hoots for the expectations of academic criticism, though they do frequently satisfy those expectations without attempting to do so. Geniuses, however, are few, and academic criticism does its worst service to art when it browbeats the lesser artists into obedience to an orthodox code. The lesser artist in determined quest of the universal, achieves, usually, only the general —not Everyman but the shape of Everyman. Faced by his apparently twofold world—of Appearance and Experience—the lesser artist may at will, if he sees his problem aright, attempt either the quasi-universal vision which will produce a flatly generalized presentation; or the definitely personal vision which may provide an excitingly

unusual (a unique) presentation. His unique presentation may have no value other than its uniqueness, but uniqueness is in itself a value—infinitely variable in degree, it is true, yet still with a positive value however infinitesimal. Poetry, properly considered, must give an affirmative answer to the question: *Does this communicate a unique vision of the world?* (Readers have the personal right to approve or disapprove the vision provided; though there is no sound reason for their doing the one or the other—unless subsequently and independently—because aesthetic response to the unique vision should not be clouded by non-aesthetic judgment.) There is no justification, ultimately, for a new poet except the gift to perceive the world afresh—as might a new Adam (or a new Eve) in a new Eden. If the modern poet should happen to be an industrial Adam contemplating a new Hades, the change of environment should not injure poetry, since Eden has no essential advantage over Hades as material for poetry.

The modern poet's manifesto might run: *I recreate in my poetry the world I perceive; not the world seen by Shakespeare, or Milton, or Keats or any other. I strive in my poetry to communicate my own perceptions; not to make you see what I see, but to recreate for you the experience I have in my unique perception of the universe, and in the unique universe I create about me from the material of my own sensations.* The claim made (at least implicitly) by the modern poet that he himself creates a material universe, and is not simply moulded by THE created universe, represents an extension of human consciousness. When Edith Sitwell announces a "smooth black lacquer sea', 'the ghostly water, Day', 'a little cold pig-snouted breeze', 'stars like empty wooden nuts', she is temporarily creating a universe (or a series of universes) from the material of her own sensations, and communicated to the reader in that material. There is obviously something maladroit in the method of approach when readers

say, '*I've* never seen "stars like empty wooden nuts", nor felt "a pig-snouted breeze".' And the approach is little better, aesthetically, if another reader here and there should respond triumphantly, 'Oh, I *have*!' The need is not to attempt, successfully or otherwise, to align Edith Sitwell's personal universe with any other personal universe; but that we should be willing to receive the unique vision and share the unique universe of Edith Sitwell (though hers is not 'unique' in any more important sense than that of any true poet).

But while the onus of adaptation to the new mode devolves upon the individual reader, the onus of proof of its validity must be upon the authors. No guilt rests upon a reader who fails to be at once sympathetic to changed tendencies in art, though more than once in recent years artists have sought to bully their way toward acceptance, without adequate explanation of their aims. A manifesto of intention was not regarded by Wordsworth as ignoble truckling to half-wits, yet Wordsworth was, comparatively, a 'simple' poet. Modernist poets, who have no sort of authority behind them, sometimes appear to assume that the public has no function but to accept, without cause given. Healthily sceptical, the public often decides that a modernist who omits to explain his purpose has no purpose. This difficulty has not been grave in regard to the Sitwells, because they are very moderate modernists; but even they, belying their admirable personal courtesy, have conducted a tiresome feud against contemporaries who preferred to follow past models.

Only Edith, of the three Sitwells, is strikingly different from the average poetic poet: (*a*) in seeking to communicate sensation, more than to describe; (*b*) in avoidance of worn-out traditional imagery and metaphor; (*c*) in adapting poetry to modern musical (mainly dance) rhythms; (*d*) in (her own words) studying 'the effect that texture has on

rhythm, and the effect that varying and elaborate patterns of rhymes and of assonances and dissonances have upon rhythm'.[1] What measure of success she may achieve in (*a*), depends upon the reader's response to (*b*), (*c*), and (*d*). The Sitwells (this applies to all three poets), in escaping from the general convention, have taken refuge in a much narrower particular convention, which more quickly appears irritatingly mannered than the commoner formal poetic diction appears irritatingly second-hand. Unicorns and phoenixes, when they become familiar, are less amusing than lambs and nightingales; too many satyrs are as maddening as too many fairies; while a coloured-toy Christmas-tree world and the atmosphere of fairy tale do not satisfy for long outside children's playtime. When Edith Sitwell has finished enjoying herself hugely like a child with lots and lots of picture-books and quaint bright objects in the day-nursery, where the fire is usually 'furry as a bear', she hurries off

> Beneath the galloon
> Of the midnight sky

to an everlasting Chelsea studio party where, in a costume by Clarkson,

> Old
> Sir
> Faulk,
> Tall as a stork,
> Before the honeyed fruits of dawn were ripe, would walk.

There is no widespread dissent from the theory that Art is Communication; but for the theory to find undisputed acceptance, account must be taken of the quality and significance of the experience to be communicated, since art

[1] Introduction to *Collected Poems*.

must submit to the ultimate test of value. *Art as Communication* sets out with an advantage over *Art as Imitation*, because it promises more from the human angle. Transmission of experience suggests, immediately, a more fruitful adventure than imitation of appearances. If it is held (as some do hold) that every shade and quality of individual experience is *worth* communicating—as the voluntary discharge of a new and (to someone) enlarging fragment of life—the point need not be disputed. But no amount of interesting experimentation in that direction will invalidate traditional (imitative) art unless the modernist, over an extended period of time, gives to a greater number of persons a more intense pleasure than traditional art could give. And, up to the present, the modernists have handicapped themselves by their coterie spirit.

The term 'modernist' has been used here of the Sitwells, though, in fact, they are only on the fringe of the movement. They have so far conformed to the minimum requirements of tradition as to use language which is intelligible in itself even though the full purport of its word-associations may not always be at once apparent. But the modernist poet properly so-called goes farther, and travels from the breaking-down of logical thought-sequences to the disintegration of single words. Thus, T. S. Eliot, in the last lines of *The Waste Land*:

> I sat upon the shore
> Fishing, with the arid plain behind me
> Shall I at least set my lands in order?
> London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down
> *Poi s'a'cose nel foco che gli affina*
> *Quando fiam ceu chelidon*—O swallow swallow
> *Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie*
> These fragments I have shored against my ruins
> Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe.
> Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.
> Shantih shantih shantih

and E. E. Cummings, in *is* 5:

Among

these
red pieces of
day(against which and
quite silently hills
made of blueandgreen paper

scorchbend ingthem
-selves-U
pcurv E, into :
anguish(clim
b)ing
s-p-i-r a-
l
and,disappear)
Satanic and blasé

a black goat lookingly wanders

To understand the eleven lines quoted from T. S. Eliot (or, at least, to follow the allusions) the reader needs either (*a*) to refer to Jessie L. Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*, the *Purgatorio*, the *Pervigilium Veneris*, a sonnet by Gérard de Nerval, Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, and the *Upanishads*; or (*b*) to have his mind already stored with recollections of these works. To comprehend the whole of *The Waste Land*, considerably more erudition is required, as well as the patience to create from T. S. Eliot's discontinuous technique of presentation whatever experience of the universe it is intended to communicate. Critics whose judgment it would be merely silly to flout are of the opinion that *The Waste Land* is *the* great poem of our time. But only mental snobbery could persuade the average reader to submit

to that opinion without personal conviction. Does T. S. Eliot concern himself with the average reader? He does not. The average reader, however, does concern himself with literature and also, therefore, with T. S. Eliot as a figure in literature. What is it that is found by the average reader (who is mainly the man and woman of fair intelligence and moderate education) when he opens Eliot's poems? That the author has painstakingly entrenched himself behind the ramparts of his own intellect—clearly with an experience he desires to communicate (else why should he publish?), but determined that communication shall not be effected until (to refer to the notes to *The Waste Land*) the difficulties of the poem have been elucidated in the light of Jessie Weston's book on the Grail legend, of *The Golden Bough*, and of the scores of further literary sources named in the seven pages of notes to a poem of only 433 lines. A little discouraged by the labour proposed, the average reader turns from the notes to see what he can make of it unaided. (Shakespeare and the great poets of the past—he thinks, a little resentfully—managed to get on without this palaver.) He probably gathers vaguely (for *The Waste Land* is James Joycean in its fragmentary technique and its interior monologues) that . . . no! he gives it up and decides to be a comfortable happy half-wit; panting after the unhappy intellectuals is (he thinks) too exhausting. For he gathers, at least, that the poet, in *The Waste Land*, is very unhappy about something. He feels, as he stumbles through the poem, that there is a sense of pain, of loss, of futility, of death. He catches echoes from Shakespeare, from Spenser, from the Bible, from Goldsmith, from old songs, from ragtime, from the barman's cry: Hurry up please its time. . . . Hurry up please its time . . .; he suspects scores of other echoes unfamiliar to him. And amid a phantasmagoria of references, he finds now and again passages that

even his bemused wits leap to with the recognizing excitement stirred by indubitable poetry:

> When we came back, late, from the Hyacinth garden,
> Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not
> Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither
> Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,
> Looking into the heart of light, the silence.

> Unreal City,
> Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
> A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
> I had not thought death had undone so many.
> Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
> And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.
> Flowed up the hill and down King William Street,
> To where Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours
> With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine.

Here is live poetry—in a desert. In the desert of our civilization? Can it be (the average reader asks, catching a gleam through the cloud wrack) that Eliot sees civilized man as a creature made out of 'a heap of broken images', scraps of beauty and wisdom, of superstition, deadening labour, jewels and cosmetics, neuritis—

> I think we are in rats' alley
> Where the dead men lost their bones

—imbecile gossip in public-houses, lechery . . . ? This is too easy a solution of the riddle of this sphinx crouching behind the ramparts of the poet's intellect; but that *The Waste Land* is a howl of despair there is evidence enough, without the confirmation of other poems by T. S. Eliot, especially *The Hollow Men*:

> Shape without form, shade without colour,
> Paralysed force, gesture without motion.

With patience, the average reader may find that, though he lacks the full intellectual equipment recommended by the poet, a consciousness of deep disturbance has been communicated by Eliot's verse. Troubled by the restless ghost of present-day civilization, T. S. Eliot's state is like that of Hamlet:

> Indeed, indeed, sirs, but this troubles me. . . .

And he has found a refuge from the pressure of that trouble, that despair, in an escape to formalism and ritual—by declaring (1928) that his general point of view has become 'classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and anglo-catholic in religion'.[1]

T. S. Eliot, an American by birth, is now domiciled in Britain; and E. E. Cummings, also American, is in part Europeanized by contacts with France. Through a fantastic confusion he was interned by the French during the War, and has since described his prison-experiences in *The Enormous Room*, a remarkable example of creative autobiography, written in a straightforward manner, though in a tough grittily masculine style entirely suited to the story Cummings had to tell. The typographical eccentricities used in many of his poems (the example quoted, page 44, is not the most extravagant) are not to be written off merely as examples of impudent 'leg-pulling'. That kind of practical joke is not amusing enough to be practised more than once or twice, and the reason must be sought at some other source. The full case for Cummings and other advanced modernists is stated in *A Survey of Modernist Poetry*, by Laura Riding and Robert Graves, and its length and complexity are such that no more than

[1] Introduction to *For Lancelot Andrewes*.

one or two points can be referred to here. It must, one supposes, be taken for granted that no reader considering E. E. Cummings' verse for the first time, without 'inside' knowledge of the author's motive, has ever detected any sense or significance in such verbal freaks as

anguish(clim
b)ing
s-p-i-r-a-
l

And even if the poem quoted could be made explicable (as in fact this poem could be, fairly easily) there are other pieces of typographical jugglery by Cummings which few people will have patience to unravel. Referring to one of his poems called *Sunset*, the authors of the *Survey* explain that Cummings' intention is to give no more than 'a complicated recipe for a sunset experience', from which the reader must make his own sunset poem, and which will then be, not Cummings' poem, 'but the poem of anybody who will be at pains to write it'. The argument is not convincing, since anyone capable of constructing a poem from 'a sunset recipe' could probably construct a sunset poem after looking at a sunset. It is not, we gather, constantly the intention of E. E. Cummings to provide only recipes for poems. If the reader will turn back to the quotation on page 44 and, for the moment, reconstruct the words there deconstructed, he may find it possible to recognize a description of day-break seen through a railway carriage window in Italy:

> The hills become as unreal as blue and green paper. The rocking of the train seems to give their rounded outlines, as they stream past, the sort of movement a long strip of paper makes when it curls up in the heat of the fire, or that the pen makes when it writes u's and e's in copperplate handwriting. . . .[1]

[1] *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* (1928), p. 86.

The authors of this commentary afterwards demonstrate how the curiosities of punctuation and type-arrangement ensure a 'double accuracy', guaranteeing clearness of poetic composition and clearness of transmission. Yet how can clearness of transmission be claimed, when the aid of two skilled interpreters has to be called in to ensure any transmission at all? Experimental work requires no justification if it carries within itself the necessary clues for its own explication. To what pass will literature come, however, if each new writer must be accompanied by a literary midwife, or by an instructed disciple to decode his writings into a comprehensible language? Writers may reasonably demand that readers shall be prepared to meet them half-way — this demand has always been implicit in the best literature. But no writers acknowledged as great have required readers to travel the whole distance. Wilful obscurity, even when practised in the name of clarity, is a major fault. Blake's obscurity, though not wilful, destroyed the Prophetic Books, and not the most devoted care of his interpreters has been successful in resurrecting them from their grave on the printed page.

Furthermore, it is a faith that must die hard if it ever has to die at all, that poetry belongs to speech primarily, and to print only secondarily. Poetry must therefore be composed in a manner permitting *all its significances* to be transmitted in speech. Is there any means by which the 'double accuracy' of Cummings' verse can be conveyed by a speaker? T. S. Eliot presents little difficulty in this respect. Edith Sitwell sets the opposite problem — that the music- and speech-rhythms essential to enjoyment of her poetry are not suggested by any notation in print. She has brought her poetry to birth for the first time for large numbers by having gramophone records made of certain poems.[1] Until the gramophone becomes the

[1] Decca Records, Nos. T.124 and 125.

common medium for the publication of poetry it is necessary to indicate in the printed form the precise method of verbal delivery when the rhythmical clue is not precisely conveyed through the metrical structure. The rhythmical clue is not *in* Edith Sitwell's poems; it has to be imposed by the voice of an instructed speaker.

The eccentricities to which reference has mainly been confined here do not relate to all E. E. Cummings' poems. Of his right to the name *poet* there can be no doubt, and but for an excess of experimentation there would most probably have been more frequent evidence of this right. This is the sestet of a sonnet which closes *is* 5:

> —let the world say ' his most wise music stole
> nothing from death '—
> you only will create
> (who are so perfectly alive) my shame:
> lady through whose profound and fragile lips
> the sweet small clumsy feet of April came
>
> into the ragged meadow of my soul.

Little reason can be assigned for including Richard Aldington with this group, except that he was at one time a leader of the Imagist group which attracted attention before the War; and that his recent poetry, though almost wholly traditional in form (free verse is already traditional), has a newness in spirit sufficient to separate it from traditional tendencies. *A Dream in the Luxembourg* (1930), a long love poem in narrative form, has no equal in its kind in recent poetry. It is a *love* poem as well as a love *poem*, and though presented under the figure of a dream it achieves intensity of clear passion—clear as flame—and intensity in lesser emotions also. Passion is rare in present-day poetry, intensity less rare; but rarest of all is *controlled intensity of passion* communicated in language of a plain sufficiency

which is always sufficient at its plainest. A beautiful poem. Pain is an undercurrent to ecstatic passion in the *Dream*; *The Eaten Heart* [1] is a continuous frenzy of pain:

> We, that are children of despair,
> Who see or think we see so clearly
> Through Philoctetes' pain and Timon's rage
> How all hope's vain, all effort null; . . .
> Frightened yet moulded by the cold hard patterns
> Beaten upon life by the loud machines—
> What do we know of love?

Which is the more heroically tragic, the burden of pain running through Aldington's soliloquy of despair in *The Eaten Heart*, or the impermeable endurance of A. E. Housman's despair? The question need not be answered, nor can any fair basis of comparison be found. Housman's despair is a philosophic conception (whatever unannounced personal causes might lie behind it); it can therefore be faced with philosophical confidence. Aldington's despair is a bitter passion, the product of War-experiences; an agony for which there is no relief save through the anodyne of a further pain:

> (*O stab the words home till the wound is deep to dull a fiercer pain*).

Through him a generation dumb with pain becomes articulate.

§ 2.—*The New Fiction*

Though H. G. Wells was the first important modernist experimenter in English fiction, there is no certainty as to what extent he influenced the younger experimenters, compared with most of whom he already seems a hidebound

[1] First published 1929; reprinted in *Imagist Anthology 1930*.

traditionalist. But Wells stirred widespread curiosity concerning problems of Space and Time; and through his writings, speculations about movements in Time and the variability of Time became widely familiar—and these speculations provoked experiments by novelists. Furthermore, Wells was a pioneer—*the* pioneer, perhaps—in wrenching the novel from the province of what he calls '*mere* literature', and giving it a wider field in which to operate. Unfortunately, the attempt to transform the novel into an intellectual clearing-house has resulted, often, only in turning it into a mental rag-bag.

What H. G. Wells did (to use a convenient inelegant colloquialism) was to *fillet* the novel—taking away its bony and sinewy framework. In his later work he persevered with this amorphous type of narrative, and the first notable difference between the old fiction and the new is that the older novelists usually gave their books a firm and well-articulated skeleton. The body of the novel might often have been adipose, but it *could* stand up. The growth of the notion that a twentieth-century novelist may say and do anything whatsoever in his book, has led to an increase of slack and flabby writing. This allows scope for incompetence, but it would be a mistake to conclude that a shapeless novel is always a sign of the author's incompetence. H. G. Wells, Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf have written 'shapelessly' because they desired to free the novel from what they considered were artificial limitations (the traditional care for plot, dialogue, lifelikeness, and so forth) and to release it for new and larger activities. Exception was taken by writers of the new fiction to lifelikeness (realism) in the older novel, on account of their conviction that such lifelikeness was not truly lifelike; that the realism was a convention, a product of artifice, and was not 'real'. Consequently they revolted from traditional realism or naturalism (such naturalism as that of Zola, or Arnold

Bennett, or—in another mode—of Jane Austen). Their revolt, however, was not in the direction of anti-realism, but of ultra-realism: the ultra-realism of Proust, Joyce, Dorothy Richardson, and Virginia Woolf, which consists in the attempt to lay bare the inward experiences and impressions of the characters. In the jargon of a particular school of novelists, they attempt to reveal 'the stream of consciousness'. The gospel of the older writers centred round the commandment, 'Thou shalt select.' The pivot of the gospel declared by some modernists seems to be, 'Thou shalt not reject.' In declaring that gospel they are, of course, the victims of an illusion, because they cannot possibly *not* reject; and their gospel is to that extent a false one. The modernist fiction-writer of the stream-of-consciousness type aims to remove everything that might stand between the reader and the reflections in the character's mirror of consciousness; and in particular to remove every possible trace of the *interpreting mind* of the author, upon which both readers and writers had hitherto relied as a means of making narrative intelligible. The intentional exclusion of an interpreting mind from between the reader and the characters is the source of the main difficulty found in reading the more extreme novels by modernist writers. It is expected by uninitiated readers that the author will provide guide-lines to enable them to find their way about in the mind and consciousness of the characters. As a fact, Dorothy Richardson does (either intentionally or unwittingly) provide occasional guide-lines. When amid the litter of Miriam Henderson's consciousness there appears this: [1]

[. . .] trees and fields and German towns and then Holland. [. . .] 'Don't go so deeply into everything, chickie. You must learn to take life as it comes. Ah-eh if I were strong I could show you how to enjoy life'—

[1] *Pointed Roofs*, by Dorothy Richardson, Ch. x, § 6.

the ultra-realist would expect it to be understood that those last few sentences are a product of the reappearance (in the mirror of consciousness) of words spoken to Miriam by her mother some time before. Actually Dorothy Richardson does provide the necessary clue, by writing (to quote her exactly, restoring passages deleted above) :

> There were green trees outside in the moonlight . . . in Luther's Germany . . . trees and fields and German towns and then Holland. [She breathed more easily. Her eyes opened serenely. Tranquil moonlight lay across the room. It surprised her like a sudden hand stroking her brow. It seemed to feel for her heart. If she gave way to it her thoughts would go. Perhaps she ought to watch it and let her thoughts go. It passed over her trouble like her mother did when she said,] ' Don't go so deeply into everything, chickie.' . . .

and so on. There—however Dorothy Richardson might desire it to be otherwise—the new method has lapsed, and the book is back in the world of orthodox fiction, where the novelist (in the passage enclosed above in square brackets) acts as interpreter between reader and character. Though J. D. Beresford has said [1] that we ' see nothing, hear nothing, feel nothing except through Miriam's senses ', Dorothy Richardson does in fact compromise frequently, hesitating to throw overboard entirely that novelist's constructive framework upon which a narrative must be built if it is to avoid unintelligibility from the reader's point of view. A's consciousness, Z's consciousness, may be continuously intelligible to A, to Z ; yet when this is so, it is only because A and Z are already in possession of essential clues which lie in their own past. If states of consciousness are to be continuously understandable when set down in writing for general reading, a body of information must be added for the reader's enlightenment—information drawn from the

[1] ' Experiment in the Novel ' (*Tradition and Experiment in Literature* : Oxford 1929).

past and showing the basis upon which existing states of consciousness rest. The only way in which such information can be conveyed is by accepting the conventions of authorship, and acknowledging that the realized presence of an author is necessary, because only the author or some figure created by the author can impart certain vital information.

Dorothy Richardson has failed to carry through with logical consistency the experiment upon which she started, but that experiment has been completed independently by James Joyce. *Ulysses*, published in Paris in 1922, occupied Joyce for seven years. In its immense length it attempts to reveal all life in one day. The 'hero' is a Dublin Jew advertisement canvasser, Leopold Bloom, and it has been claimed that in this character is given for the first time in any book an absolutely complete portrait of a man. A complete portrait of a complete man would have made a more memorable book. Even if it be conceded gratuitously that the muddy depravity of Leopold Bloom is typical of the general run of civilized men, no normal man has (proportionately) so much of muddy depravity as Bloom. The portrait is a possible one, perhaps a true one; but if the book is a complete portrait of an actual man, Bloom is an actual man in whom morbid preoccupations heavily outweigh the rest of his qualities. There is no part of the underside of life into which the reader is not conducted by Bloom in this day in Dublin; the whole working of the physical organism is unveiled. Many questions of necessity and taste are involved in the working-out of this experiment, but the natural fastidiousness still felt by most people might be less offended if the emphasis in *Ulysses* were more equally balanced between the angel and the beast. Bestiality gets disproportionate attention in *Ulysses*; and whatever mental effort may be made, it is not easy to overcome the physical nausea aroused by the book. This nausea is not due to distaste for facing 'the facts of life'. Passages in the book

nauseate for the same reason as offal nauseates. There are 'facts of life' of which every single man, woman, and child is inevitably and daily aware. To be continuously disgusted by them would be absurd, but the majority rightly prefer not to discuss them except medically. The reason for this preference is exactly the same as the reason for our not caring to discuss seasickness analytically. When the War tore down the customary privacies of life, men did not feel that the violation of privacy was an achievement, but an embarrassment temporarily and a loss permanently. If delicacy is an old-fashioned virtue, we are poorer by its going; and a hundred such books as *Ulysses* would not compensate.

The one real interest of the book is that Joyce goes all the way in the direction where Dorothy Richardson stopped half-way. She failed to follow her method to its logical end of complete incoherence. Joyce continues the whole distance, and spends his last forty-three pages on what is certainly the fullest attempt yet made to reveal the non-sequential ebb and flow of human consciousness. Those last pages, entirely without punctuation, record the silent reverie of Mrs. Bloom (who is as muddily depraved as her husband) before she falls asleep at night. Numerous recollections of earlier years come floating up, and a fairly full autobiography of the woman is provided. Yet—as an 'interior monologue'—it is all kept within the compass of Marian Bloom's wandering consciousness on the night concerned; and although she moves backward and here and there in time, the narrative never goes outside the frame of her immediate consciousness.

A long section, devoted to the adventures of Bloom and Stephen Dedalus in Nighttown, is in the form of a dramatic fantasy, reminiscent of the Witches' Sabbath in Goethe's *Faust*. But the foulness suggested by Goethe is replaced by a full statement of foulness in Joyce's book, and in that

section bestiality is entirely released from control. Following the Nighttown episode, Stephen Dedalus goes home, apparently to supper, with Bloom. Then with an astonishing accumulation of irrelevant detail is given not only a catalogue of Bloom's mental furniture, but a catalogue also of everything that Bloom does and sees and hears. One of the more straightforward examples will suffice to indicate the general manner:

What lay under exposure on the lower middle and upper shelves of the kitchen dresser opened by Bloom?

On the lower shelf five vertical breakfast plates, six horizontal breakfast saucers on which rested inverted breakfast cups, a moustache-cup, uninverted, and saucer of Crown Derby, four white goldrimmed eggcups, an open shammy purse displaying coins, mostly copper, and a phial of aromatic violet comfits. On the middle shelf a chipped eggcup containing pepper, a drum of table salt, four conglomerated black olivesin oleaginous paper, an empty pot of Plumtree's potted meat, an oval wicker basket bedded with fibre and containing one Jersey pear, a halfempty bottle of William Gilbey and Co's white invalid port, half disrobed of its swathe of coralpink tissue paper, a packet of Epps's soluble cocoa, five ounces of Anne Lynch's choice tea at 2/- per lb. in a crinkled leadpaper bag, a cylindrical canister containing the best crystallised lump sugar, two onions, one the larger, Spanish, entire, the other, smaller, Irish, bisected with augmented surface and more redolent, a jar of Irish Model Dairy's cream, a jug of brown crockery containing a naggin and a quarter of soured adulterated milk, converted by heat into water, acidulous serum and semisolidified curds, which added to the quantity subtracted for Mr Bloom's and Mrs Fleming's breakfasts made one imperial pint, the total quantity originally delivered, two cloves, a halfpenny and a small dish containing a slice of fresh ribsteak. On the upper shelf a battery of jamjars of various sizes and proveniences.[1]

Admitting the experimental interest of *Ulysses*, it is nevertheless time for the James Joyce myth to be dispelled.

[1] The spelling, punctuation and spacing are given as in the original; but *Ulysses* was set up in France, and there is a prefatory note apologizing for printers' errors. It is sometimes impossible to distinguish between errors and new word-forms employed by Joyce.—A. C. W.

In more recent years he has been giving out at long intervals small gobbets of unintelligible prose from the portentously named *Work in Progress*, of which one fragment—*Anna Livia Plurabelle*—is now available in England in a shilling pamphlet. Here is a sentence taken at random :

. . . Well, arundgirond in a waveney lyne aringarouma she pattered and swung and sidled, dribbling her boulder through narrowa mosses, the diliskydrear on our drier side and the vilde vetchvine agin us, curara here careero there, not knowing which medway or weser to strike it, edereider making chattahoochee all to her ain chichiu, like Santa Claus at the cree of the pale and puny, nistling to hear for their tiny hearties, her arms encircling Isolabella, then running with reconciled Romas and Reims, then bathing Dirty Hans' spatters with spittle, with a Christmas box apiece for aisch and iveryone of her childer, the birthday gifts they dreamt they gabe her, the spoiled she fleetly laid at our door !

No sinister reminders of the obtuse folly of the critics on first looking into Keats or on first hearing Wagner should dissuade anyone with a reasoned conviction that James Joyce's later prose is pretentious nonsense from saying so. He already has his commentators who explain and decode him, but the best fun of this absurd farce will not be reached until the initiates begin to translate him into other languages —including English.

The attitude of the Joycean commentators is shown by a sentence in the preface to Stuart Gilbert's book on *James Joyce's 'Ulysses'*: 'In the seven years which Mr. Joyce devoted to the construction of this monument of literature, well-planned and strongly built, he never once betrayed the authority of intellect to the hydra-headed rabble of the mental underworld.' The disciples of this master have been telling the world for more than ten years that *Ulysses* is a great book 'destined to take a permanent place in the world's literature'; but they have not attempted to explain *why* it is great and permanent. They have repeatedly

pointed out that it is constructed on the ground-plan of Homer's *Odyssey*; they have spoken with admiration of its system of 'correspondences', 'recurrent themes', 'interlocking episodes', 'internal rhythm', 'aesthetic stasis', but they have not once demonstrated that these features have any value. Stuart Gilbert says in his commentary: 'At a first reading of *Ulysses* the average reader is impressed most of all by the striking psychological "realism" of the narrative.' (Actually, of course, the average reader is not thus impressed at all.) '*Ulysses* is a book of life, the life of a microcosm which is a small-scale replica of the universe.' It would be closer to accuracy to say that *Ulysses* is a mental dustbin into which the author has tossed scrap-ends of language, literature, philosophy, psychology, religion, magic, Irish history, and numerous other odds and ends which drift into a disorganized mind. To assert that the book 'achieves a coherent and integral interpretation of life' is to take the meaning out of words. *Ulysses* interprets nothing that is finally significant; its coherence is only occasional; considered as a whole book, it is entirely incoherent. Decision in the controversy as to whether it is pornographic or not depends upon the degree of sexual stability in the reader; but if in this matter there can be a stage lower than the pornographic, *Ulysses* is on that lower level. Anyone who might have the misfortune to draw a first impression of sex-relations from this source would believe sex to be grubby through and through, and the spreading of this film of dirt over the creative impulse makes *Ulysses* a meanly blasphemous work. An intellectual disservice has been done to English readers by the banning of the book from England. Its exclusion has given it the success of martyrdom and the spurious importance which attaches to any semi-secret document. No community would tolerate for long such moral insanitation and mental pretentiousness as are combined in *Ulysses*.

To turn to Virginia Woolf's books after those of Dorothy Richardson and James Joyce is to pass from a world of drabness and gloom to a world of sunshine. As the youngest daughter of Sir Leslie Stephen, Virginia Woolf no doubt lived in early years amid a scholarly circle such as that of which she gives us glimpses in her first and simplest novel, *The Voyage Out*, which should give no difficulty to readers who enjoy very good talk and are satisfied with mental action. *The Voyage Out* is to some extent reminiscent of Meredith's style, but in atmosphere it has little of the sharpness, the astringency, the hard clear outlines of Meredith. On the contrary, it is coloured with a warm golden radiance; its outlines are tremulous, like a landscape seen through a heat-haze; and the whole book is touched by an extraordinary sensitiveness, both emotionally and intellectually. If *The Voyage Out* has any affinity with the work of any other writer, it is with E. M. Forster's novels that it might be compared. There is the same sense of life so delicately poised, of people so sensitively balanced in thought and feeling, that the rough breath of common life would cause the aery structure of their culture to topple. A reader of *The Voyage Out* feels that it is essential to tread softly and to breathe lightly while in the company of the book. Beginners will find this the most satisfactory of Virginia Woolf's novels, for the narrative has more continuity than is found in her later stories, where she adopts a deliberately fragmentary method of presentation.

About the middle of the nineteen-twenties, in a pamphlet called *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown*, Virginia Woolf prophesied that we were on the verge of a new great age in English literature. She pleaded, however, that for the present we must 'tolerate the spasmodic, the obscure, the fragmentary, the failure', because (she thought) the younger writers were feeling their way toward a new method of portraying characters in fiction. She gave the opinion

that the older contemporary writers—Wells, Galsworthy, Bennett—concentrate too much upon the material conditions and circumstances of their characters, and suggested that the political and social and humanitarian preoccupations of Wells and Galsworthy sidetrack attention from the personalities of the people in their books. She argued also that Arnold Bennett is so much concerned with detailing the surroundings of his characters that he fails to see the characters themselves. Whatever dissent this estimate of older contemporaries may provoke, the expression of her view helps to explain why Virginia Woolf approaches her own characters from unusual angles and presents them in unusual attitudes. Opening her novel, *Jacob's Room*, we are immediately in the company of a woman writing a letter while sitting on the sand at the seaside. There is no preparatory explanation. We learn only indirectly and later (so far as we learn at all) who and what Mrs. Flanders was. We jump, as it were, right into the middle of Betty Flanders' personality, and are left to grope and explore on our own account—sometimes tiresomely it may be felt. But the reward is in a quickening and new intensity of perception and a sense of sharpened sensation, as though we were seeing and hearing much more acutely than we commonly see and hear. In an early passage of *Jacob's Room*, an apartment in Mrs. Flanders' seaside lodgings is so described that it seems to be flooded with brilliant interior light that shows everything (personalities as well as material objects) with almost disturbing acuteness. It is possible to experience an intense emotional irritation while reading Virginia Woolf's books and simultaneously to admire them with the brain. There is in them an abiding sense of the beauty of words, brilliance, and intellectual force; yet the beauty and brilliance and intellectuality never quite allow them to be human.

The discontinuous method practised by Virginia Woolf in her later novels is illustrated by the sudden jumps taken

by the narrative in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Mrs. Dalloway has walked from Westminster to a Bond Street florist's shop. A motor-car tyre bursts outside the shop :

> Passers-by who, of course, stopped and stared, had just time to see a face of the very greatest importance against the dove-grey upholstery, before a male hand drew the blind and there was nothing to be seen except a square of dove-grey. . . .
>
> Edgar J. Watkiss, with his roll of lead piping round his arm, said audibly, humorously of course : " The Proime Minister's kyar."
>
> Septimus Warren Smith, who found himself unable to pass, heard him.
>
> Septimus Warren Smith, aged about thirty, pale-faced, beak-nosed, wearing brown shoes and a shabby overcoat, with hazel eyes which had that look of apprehension in them which makes complete strangers apprehensive too. The world has raised its whip; where will it descend ? . . .
>
> Mrs. Dalloway, coming to the window with her arms full of sweet peas, looked out with her little pink face pursed in enquiry. Every one looked at the motor car. Septimus looked. Boys on bicycles sprang off. Traffic accumulated. And there the motor car stood, with drawn blinds, and upon them a curious pattern like a tree, Septimus thought. . . .

As the chapter continues, more and more of the people in the streets pass casually in and out of the narrative, as Watkiss the plumber and an Italian girl and her husband pass in and out (to reappear, again casually, later). The technique of the cinema has been adapted for literary purposes in *Mrs. Dalloway*. The book takes a few hours of life, and by occasional jumping flashes we look into the experiences of a number of people more or less loosely related to the main character.

Orlando (called a biography, but partly a novel, partly a fantasy, and partly a satire) is as straightforward as anything Virginia Woolf has yet written—provided the reader is prepared to make the initial concession that, in a world of the fantastic imagination, a human being may live for

centuries and change sex during that lifetime. That concession once made, *Orlando* is easy to read and often wonderfully beautiful and graceful in its descriptions and style. Various attempts have been made to interpret *Orlando* as allegory, though the concluding sentences might have led 'interpreters' to suspect that they were being inveigled by an elaborate highbrow lark into a wild-goose chase. In so far as any additional significance is to be read into *Orlando*, it might be regarded as, in part, a satire upon the contemporary fashion of writing books in which the Time convention is thrown to the winds.

Virginia Woolf may be right when she charges Arnold Bennett and others with encumbering their characters with too much material litter, yet Edwin Clayhanger, Soames Forsyte, Alfred Polly, do somehow convince us of their existence in an actual world; whereas her own characters rarely seem to live outside her own mind, a limitation shared with some of E. M. Forster's people. After reading her, there is an added zest in jolly low-down *real* things—bloaters for supper, and brandy-balls, and comic songs, and Edgar Wallace.

§ 3.—*Time and the Novelists*

A novel which sets out to explore consciousness with any pretence of naturalism must hold itself free from allegiance to chronological sequence. Clive Bell has said that Proust employs 'blocks of time', which may be arranged in any sequence or according to any pattern or even any disregard of pattern. But the term 'blocks of time' hardly gives an accurate idea of the composition of Proust's or other modernist novels. The figure is too static, and suggests a degree of fixity which is not attained. The image provided by the modernist novel is more like the curiously fascinating accidental association of colours which appears

It may be said (though guardedly and with reservations) that there is no action. What there certainly is, however, is *agitation*—agitation of mind and spirit by passion. Yet since we are looking into a mirror, what we see is not *action*, but only the *reflection of action*—action at a distance in time, and therefore, in effect, dead action. An immediate and unbridgeable gulf lies between action directly displayed and reflected action. We can still rouse ourselves almost to a frenzy of indignation and despair over the World War, with which we are still in direct contact. But the Napoleonic Wars, of which we know only the reflection in history and literature, do not stir in us any similar passion —though to the early nineteenth century the Napoleonic campaign was as terrible as the late War to us.

The sustained reflectiveness of Proust, his mood of unbroken reverie, causes everything in his books to seem muted. It is as though the life represented is the life of people shut in a sealed and sound-proof glass cell, into which we peer; in which the past may wither and die, but from which there is no means of escape. Whatever past experiences in our personal life we forget, they have not (as we often declare they have) *escaped from* the memory; though they may have decayed and perished *in* the memory, which is littered with the remains of a dead past at the same time as it harbours attenuated forms from a past that is still living. Memory must therefore always have something of the atmosphere of a tomb; at best it will be uncannily quiet, and sickly sweet with the odour of shrivelled flowers.

Proust's method (in this it is entirely original) rests upon a postulate that the whole of every life, not only his own, but those of others, lies spread out before the observer; so that while he is contemplating a situation, say, in someone's middle life, the artist can look before and after, and see both what has happened and what was about to happen to that person or to himself.[1]

[1] *In the Margin of Proust*, by Desmond MacCarthy (*Life and Letters*, March and April, 1929).

The method thus described[redacted]TURES
the modern novelist's trans[redacted] of the Little Theatre
Proust is constantly movi[redacted]e financially prosperous,
according to the particula[redacted]opments have been less
any one moment. 'His [redacted]
his own soul[1]'.

Those who inquire, 'W[redacted]tury drama in England
about?' can only be told[redacted]lfilled part of its promise.
'about'. It is 'about' [redacted]. The cause commonly
the arts, and much else [redacted]ost-War English drama is
experience of cultured ar[redacted]old crimes the commercial
sixty pages of *Swann's W*[redacted] to commit. The com-
ning with the sentence, '[redacted], the moneyed buccaneer
bed early.' Immediately[redacted]d of commerce and buys
crowded with reflections[redacted]y—is a menace to drama
events and sensations, dra[redacted]sually so soon a bankrupt
from the years which sep[redacted]. A more probable answer
earlier self—the child w[redacted] with the theatre?' would
beginning denotes two [redacted]*wrong with it*. The theatre
(i) his intense subjectiv[redacted]d by the financier and the
the artist's material in t[redacted]may be wholly out of touch
preoccupation with Tim[redacted]nction. Literature has done
A full discussion of t[redacted]an commerce has; and if
contemporary literature[redacted]or the depressed state of
Lewis' *Time and Weste*[redacted]en-twenties, let it be the
limited by a diffuse and [redacted]rcial managers, who did at
of argument to escape [redacted]hem!) to be entertaining,
Lewis is definitely a n[redacted]t often seems to think that
connotes one who is d[redacted]in the theatre as compared
the Past. He says:[redacted]nda. Shakespeare, Molière,
[redacted]re before they were men-of-
[redacted]ime they were members of a
[redacted] man-of-letters to become a

There is nothing for it to[redacted]
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upon the Past; its stock i[redacted]—[redacted]is Bernard Shaw, and that
[redacted]' lit's job.'
[redacted]nd what

THE N

in *time*, not certainly in space.
solution. More and more it is

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'life' through the post fr
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scullion and a henchman t
lighting experts; but that
willing servants of THE TH
end in itself or for itself.
no human value, in itself;
life only when it is *the temple*
as it was in Greece; as it w
Ibsen; as it is with Shaw.
word made flesh the theat
pressure from movies and talk
a machine can satisfyingly
from the human lips in the p

But this ideal, it might be
the man-of-letters. It is n
man-of-letters has learned t
write plays. Playwrights ca
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or in the streets or at gathe
as Shaw learned. The whole
of the Theatre usefully dem
team work, but it is mostly supe
theatre is concerned. Close all
that amazing 'thing' we call
At bottom
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ollowers on account of his
doctrine is 'anti-physical and
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To applaud it as a suc-
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Drama

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iveness might do more

than anything else to save the stifled soul of the present-day theatre.

When using the *spoken* word, and not causing the actors to attempt to speak the *written* word, the playwright need admit no limit to the range of his possible subject-matter. In the past, drama has surveyed fairly exhaustively the surfaces and the recesses of personal relations, family and social relations, the relations between human and divine, man's relation to himself. The one extension made by English drama since the War has been in the attempt to give dramatic representation to international problems. The modern theatre must necessarily find room for the treatment of these large questions, but when it does so the plays must be judged firstly on their merits *as plays*. Good intentions and a serious purpose are not enough: a play must entertain while it instructs, if it aims to instruct. It must persuade, not harangue. The spoken word must be used with a primary regard for *dramatic value*; not as a didactic instrument.

C. K. Munro's *The Rumour* (the most noteworthy attempt to dramatize the international situation) is handicapped by its general unwieldiness of structure, and by the author's determination to report the speeches of his characters and not to write dialogue for them. In a foreword the dramatist notes that 'the action is presented in the form of natural human action, not human action in a modified form as in poetic drama'. But all good stage drama, surely, is the presentation of human action 'in modified form'; the modification in poetic drama may be more ample in degree, but it is not vitally different in kind. 'In dramatic presentation,' adds C. K. Munro, 'condensation is at the present day so essential, that to bring the matter within the bounds of ordinary representation, it is imperative to cut away all that can go without hurt to the general structure.' If the phrase 'at the present day' be omitted, that sentence

becomes a restatement of a principle of construction in drama. Condensation *is* essential; to cut away all that can go without hurt to the general structure *is* imperative—whether in the present day or at any other time. Of course a play loses nothing if it suggests the generous superfluity found in nature—all great art has some suggestion of this as a condition of its greatness. The superfluity of Munro's *The Rumour*, *Progress*, and other plays, is not a generous natural overflow of life; it is a stubborn arid wordiness that insists upon full statement where suggestion would be adequate. The opening conversation between Luke and Kitty (almost a monologue by Luke); that between Jones and Smith in Part I, Act 2, Scene ii; the speeches by and to the deputation in the Prime Minister's room (II, 1, i): these are examples of the insufficiently dramatic method persistently employed; it is usually good reporting but rarely good drama. Bernard Shaw's long speeches have always the cadences of art (often of poetic art) and always a sense of what is needed to hold the attention of a theatre audience. Munro's argument—that war may be deliberately fomented by the disgusting murderous jugglery of financiers and other interested parties—has the importance of a tremendous truth, and it is all the greater pity, therefore, that persuasiveness should be overweighted by didacticism and wordiness. *At Mrs. Beam's* and occasional passages in his other plays show that the features commented upon here are not the result of lack of skill, but of a mistaken conviction that condensation is not an essential but a demand due to prejudice and fashion.

After providing evidence in *A Bill of Divorcement* (1921) that she could write the Pinero-type 'problem-play' better than Pinero, by employing a real problem and real people, Clemence Dane's following plays were not of particular interest until she wrote *Adam's Opera* (1928), 'an attempt to translate into terms of the theatre an impression of the

period which directly succeeded that awakening which we call "the War". . . . The impression produced upon such members of the general public as are articulate or semi-articulate, is the impression which seems to me most worth studying'.[1] To put the 'mass-mind and its contradictory impressions' on to the stage is so desirable as an extension of the range of drama that Clemence Dane's failure to 'bring off' this experiment matters little in comparison with the importance of the experiment itself. The mass-mind—articulate, semi-articulate, and inarticulate—is the preponderating unexplored factor in twentieth-century life, and its exploration is a necessary service. Clemence Dane's fairy-tale and nursery-rhyme machinery in *Adam's Opera*, if not immediately explicable, is nevertheless a possible vehicle for the simple symbolism required for such a theme, if symbolism is to be the medium of transmission. Comment on the play is not called for here, since its impressive effect comes from the certainty that Clemence Dane had something important to transmit—something that is tremendously significant, indeed. She has not succeeded in transmitting it lucidly, but there is no deliberate freakishness. The mass-mind is a parade of phantasms never at quiet, and a phantasmic method alone can display it. If it could be dogmatically stated (and, unfortunately in this instance, it cannot) that the greatness of a play is in proportion to the fruitfulness of its animating idea, a claim might be made that *Adam's Opera* is as important as any play written in the nineteen-twenties. The text should be studied in relation to the preface by those who wish to observe the fluxions, the cross-currents, and the drifting of the post-War decade.

The first act of *The Silver Tassie*, by Sean O'Casey, it is commonly agreed, is the best thing the author has so far written in the O'Casey manner. But with that, agreement

[1] Preface to *Adam's Opera*.

ends. Some hearty admirers of the first act consider the other three acts either chaotic or blasphemous, or both; others hold that *The Silver Tassie* throughout is a masterpiece. The objectors' dislike is due to O'Casey's impassioned attitude toward war and the human devastation caused by war. War-sufferings, in the general opinion, should be both contemplated and endured with patient fortitude. Sean O'Casey's response to war-sufferings in *The Silver Tassie* is to curse the universe and, figuratively, to spit in the face of heaven. The impulse to respond in that way has been felt by thousands, and under the stress of such an impulse a sense of balance and judicial calm is impossible. Anything written under that stress must, by the nature of the impulse, be bitter, disproportionate (because pain is uppermost), and infuriated. And by what right shall we declare that the human agony inflicted by war must not be represented in terms of bitterness and fury? By the right and in the name of artistic restraint, reticence, or good manners? The representation would undoubtedly be more lastingly effective if such inner checks could be in the mind of the writer, yet the fact that they are not in his mind is no cause for amazement. Work which came out of the agony of war is the product of an impulse independent of art. For posterity its value will be in the degree to which art and the restraints of art entered in; for the immediate generation the value is in the fury and fire which may help to cauterize old unhealed wounds. In the later acts a strange combination of chanted verse and spoken prose is used in *The Silver Tassie* for the presentation of this tragedy of Harry Heegan, D.C.M., who has won the silver tassie for his local football club and is paralysed in the War, from the waist downward. The soldiers in the War-zone scene are sometimes used as a semi-mechanical sub-human chorus for delivering a refrain of labour and misery:

1st Soldier. Cold and wet and tir'd.
2nd Soldier. Wet and tir'd and cold.
3rd Soldier. Tir'd and cold and wet.

The Bearers and the Wounded on the Stretchers have their special chants, though nothing else in the play is so impressive and powerful as the hymn of obeisance to the guns :

Corporal (singing) :
Hail cool-hardened tower of steel emboss'd
With the fever'd, figment thoughts of man ;
Guardian of our love and hate and fear,
Speak for us to the inner ear of God !
Soldiers :
We believe in God and we believe in thee.

Here, and in following scenes, staff-officers, visiting civilians, doctors and nurses are seen through a film of satiric hate. Susie a religious enthusiastic in Act I ' goes gay ' as a nurse ; Jessie turns from the disabled Harry to his friend who won the V.C. for carrying Harry's useless body out of the line of fire ; and the end comes with Susie singing after Harry has been wheeled out of the dance-hall :

He is gone, we remain, and so
Let him wrap himself up in his woe—
For he is a life on the ebb,
We a full life on the flow.

That which protests against *The Silver Tassie* is the spirit of life on the flow ; the spirit that desires to wash over and obliterate the memory of desolation ; that does not wish to hear the plaint of life on the ebb.

The Silver Tassie is among the few British plays touched by the Expressionist movement, which has strongly affected playwrights in Germany and America. The United States

performs for the English-speaking world a useful service as a receiving-station and clearing-house for ideas from all sources. The ready reception given by her writers to experimental forms and the frank readiness with which they reject what is non-conformable to their purposes, helps to weed-out freak ideas often before they have percolated to England directly from their sources of origin. Expressionism has had various manifestations, which differ not only in the several countries where it has been practised, but also in the several art-forms used as its media. But in the novel, in poetry, and in the drama Expressionism is always intensely personal to the author, who aims to create a vision of Life reflected through his own individual consciousness of it—or, alternatively, through the projected consciousness of such characters as he may create for the purpose. Expressionism makes no attempt to correct any bias or error that might be presumed to lie in any one single vision of life. If the Expressionist happened to see life as an unvarying system of bright blue geometrical figures, he would present his vision of it in that shape. If he saw it as a pageant of death in which men and women are always hooded ghouls, he would not be deterred from depicting it so by any protest that men and women are *not* hooded ghouls. If he sees them imaginatively in that form, he might sustain an argument (if he cared at all to go outside the frame of his own consciousness) that there is a sense in which all men and women *are* hooded ghouls. One definition of the Expressionists' work in Germany is that 'they destroyed reality, decomposing it to create out of its elements new forms which were intended to be symbolically representative of their understanding of life'.[1] In Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine*, a simple example of the Expressionistic form in drama, modern working men and women are seen as mechanized creatures, standardized and patternized, with

[1] *Encyclopedia Britannica* (13th edn.), new vols., III, 636-7.

no separable identity. They think mechanically, speak mechanically, behave mechanically. All their duties are dull and machine-like, and their minds and lives correspond. The names given to most of the characters—Mr. and Mrs. Zero, Mr. and Mrs. One, Two, Three, Four, Five, and Six —are symbolical of their standardization. At a party in the Zeros' house:

MRS. SIX. I like them little organdie dresses.
MRS. FIVE. Yeh, with a little lace trimmin' on the sleeves.
MRS. FOUR. Well, I like 'em plain myself.
MRS. THREE. Yeh, what I always say is the plainer the more refined.
MRS. TWO. Well, I don't think a little lace does any harm.
MRS. ONE. No, it kinda dresses it up.
MRS. ZERO. Well, I always say it's all a matter of taste.

Mr. Zero, having murdered The Boss with a paper-spike, is executed and goes to the Elysian Fields, which he cannot abide because the company is not respectable: it includes Swift and Rabelais—'ministers writin' smutty stories! Say, what kind of a dump is this, anyway?' Zero then passes through the 'cosmic laundry' where souls are prepared for their next sojourn on earth; and he who has already been a slave through fifty thousand previous lives, who is now 'a waste product, a slave to a contraption of steel and iron', goes back, lured by the illusion of Hope, to be the slave of a super-hyper-adding machine.

The Expressionistic method tends to ban the normal from art, because its label is applied only to representations of life which depart so far from normal that they must be justified by the explanation that they are refracted 'through a temperament'. *The Adding Machine* is more intensely pessimistic than any normal view of life warrants, and the exaggeration is in extent as well as in depth. Expressionism, by proposing to be symbolically representative of a particular understanding of *Life*, in the large, necessarily purports to

give a generalized view and to embody a general truth. Mr. Zero is also, in the main, Mr. One, Mr. Two, and the rest; Mr. Zero, from everlasting unto everlasting, is a slave, a waste product. The implication is that the millions in Mr. Zero's class are like him and that his slave-fate will be theirs also. Expressionism, by working in types and symbols, works as it were in heavy blocks of colour. Its representation of life is consequently lacking in gradations, in light and shade. Its generalizations are too crude to have real force.

Eugene O'Neill in the early nineteen-twenties seemed likely to be the first dramatist of world-rank to come from America. *The Emperor Jones*, *The Hairy Ape*, and several short plays, were so original in form and so abundantly vigorous, that here, it was thought, was the greatest dramatist of the younger generation. But O'Neill has the worm of experiment gnawing at his vitals, and he has never stayed to achieve perfection in any one direction before darting off on a different track. His work is consequently a litter of interesting relics and fragments. His chief endeavour in later years has been to deal effectively with the problem of multiplex personality in drama, the stage representation of the varying planes of character existent in any one individual person. He tried the use of masks (*The Great God Brown*) with only a confused result. *Strange Interlude* and *Dynamo* employ the device of the double voice—uttering aloud both the unspoken thought and the spoken statement. Except its temporary curiosity-interest, there is little to recommend this method. Eugene O'Neill's endeavours and the Expressionist method both suggest the modern playwright's preparedness to impose upon the drama an unlimited number of fresh restrictive conventions in his attempt to escape from the limits of realism. Realism professed to shed *all* the traditional conventions—the soliloquy, the aside, and many more—conveniently overlooking that the drama itself

is entirely a convention. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century dramatists had little difficulty in conveying by a few ingenuously simple devices more subtleties of character than Pirandello or Eugene O'Neill have communicated through their more elaborate but clumsy tricks.

CHAPTER IV

THE TRADITIONAL FOUNDATION

§ 1.—*Robert Bridges: 'The Testament of Beauty'*

THERE was an evil moment for twentieth-century English poetry when a doggerel rumour got abroad among young verse-writers:

> Call upon Beauty by her name
> And beauty will appear.

The unknown originator of this falsehood was responsible for the blight which caused much contemporary poetry to wither in the bud; while one eminent writer, who did far other than perish, called upon Beauty so constantly that the word will be anathema for years to come. None of these comments has any application to Robert Bridges. When he wished to create beauty in words he had ample skill and taste to create beauty without worrying Beauty, and not the least achievement of *The Testament of Beauty* is that it brought new credit to a discredited conception. The *Testament* is about many other matters than Beauty. Beauty, indeed, is the peak it climbs toward, not the base from which it begins. It conceives Beauty to be the sum and summit of experience, a part of man's aspiration after immortality. Nor is this the remote conception it may, in prose statement, appear to be. The climber whose eyes are on the peak while his feet are distant from it, is moved by that joy of endeavour which is lost in achievement, because it merges with achievement and is gone. The soul become immortal must lose its consciousness of immortality. The spirit at length

embraced by Beauty is made one *with* Beauty, and the joy of contemplation and desire is conditional upon our present distance from Beauty.

> *What is Beauty? saith my sufferings then. . . .*
> Beauty is the highest of all these occult influences,
> the quality of appearances that thru' the sense
> wakeneth spiritual emotion in the mind of man:
> And Art, as it createth new forms of beauty,
> awakeneth new ideas that advance the spirit
> in the life of Reason to the wisdom of God.[1]

Beauty, that is, is identical with the wisdom of God, toward which the human spirit is advanced through the mediation of Art.

If Bridges could be supposed to have cared what opinion the newspaper public held of him, *The Testament of Beauty* might be regarded as his exquisite revenge upon those who referred to him as 'the dumb Laureate'. His output was small between 1913 (the date of his appointment as Poet Laureate) and 1929; but the publication in that year of this philosophical poem of over 4,000 lines richly compensated the paucity of ceremonial odes. This new work sold as none other of his volumes had, and better (it was said) than any poetry since Byron's. As for its poetic quality, critics wrote that in its kind it was the most important addition to English poetry since Wordsworth's *The Prelude*.

To speak of *The Testament of Beauty* as 'a philospohical poem', without qualification, would convey an inadequate and false impression. It is, first, a poem; second, a poem that sets forth a philosophic view of life. *The Testament* can be enjoyed *as a poem*, even though (as well might be) the reader is hazy as to its philosophic import.

Since Bridges first began to write poetry he had been

[1] *The Testament of Beauty*, Book II, ll. 840-47; compare III, 789-94, and IV, 1-2.

attempting, without real success, to naturalize classical metres in English. In some of his later short poems, he felt, the result of experiments with a loose adaptation of the alexandrine (iambic hexameter line) were sufficiently promising to justify a more ambitious attempt. The opportunity came when, long after his eightieth birthday, he was moved to give expression to his reflections upon man and the universe.

Does the result suggest that the use of 'loose alexandrines' for this special purpose has any advantage over such standard verse-forms as might have been used?

The presumption must be that for reflective poetry of this kind blank verse is the only possible standard medium; rhymed verse is obviously disqualified by a formal structure which would hamper the meditative ebb and flow. Between the sixteenth and the twentieth centuries 'Marlowe's mighty line' had served every purpose from majestic to domestic; but it had not shed dignity, stateliness, and a ceremonial air. A poet, even a twentieth-century poet, *could* of course conduct his private meditations in blank verse without undue strain, but he would probably find from time to time that his meditations had passed into audible declamation. Granted that meditation on an exalted plane postulates verse and not prose, what is required is a verse-medium combining as much as possible of the non-spectacular ease of prose with the authoritative assurance of poetry. Free verse seems indicated; or it might if free verse had any (however vague) standard of measure enabling *vers librists* to determine where free verse ends and snippets of unrhythmic prose begin. Bridges' loose alexandrines could be described as free verse controlled by a modulated echo of metrical authority. There is, one is conscious, a 'regular' line (say, for example,

(We sail a changeful sea through halcyon days and storm [1])

[1] Book I, ll. 3.

to which every line has an ultimate metrical reference, but the liberty with which that reference is used, and the confident personal skill with which the 'loose alexandrines' are handled, can be seen in any half-dozen lines of *The Testament of Beauty*. If not used with 'conversational ease' they nevertheless are used with such ease of thought as is possible when the thought itself is often a difficult mental wrestling with a wayward and directionless world, as in the lines speaking of the War and its aftermath:

> alas then in what plight are we,
> knowing 'twas mankind's crowded uncleanness of soul
> that brought our plague! which yet we coud not cure nor stay;
> for Reason had lost control of his hot-temper'd steed
> and taken himself infection of the wild brute's madness;
> so when its fire slacken'd and the fierce fight wore out,
> our fever'd pulse show'd no sober return of health.
> Amid the flimsy joy of the uproarious city
> my spirit on those first jubilant days of armistice
> was heavier within me, and felt a profounder fear
> than ever it knew in all the War's darkest dismay.[1]

The Testament of Beauty revived what may be called (for want of a pleasanter term) 'the grand manner' in English nature poetry[2]: that is to say, the poet uses his (very beautiful) nature passages for a purpose beyond mere description and decoration, and as an integral part of the content of his poem. As poetic energy has waned in the twentieth century, poets have lost the power to realize the universe as a harmony and a unity in relation to poetry. The material of poetry is the universe, and *The Testament of Beauty* uses that material. Action, Mind, Sensation, Nature, God—all flow through the poem. Present-day poets in general, on the other hand, have a habit of dealing

[1] Book II, ll. 991ff.

[2] See, e.g., Book I, ll. 63–73; 276–315; II, 111–24, 345–60; III, 375–81; 1279–86; etc.

with the universe as though it were a vast mixed-fruit cake, from which they may, according to the mood of the moment, dig out some particular morsel to be 'dealt with'. 'Ah, yes! *Nature!* I will now write a Nature poem.' . . . Or a Love poem. . . . Or a Philosophical poem. . . .

It would be easier to enumerate what is omitted than what is included in *The Testament of Beauty*. Bridges was unusually well-informed both as to the past and the present, and his poem is a review (almost a *revue*) of the modern world brought into relation with the stored wisdom of the past. He was disturbed by the unrest of the present time, by the changeful sea and the labouring ship. He wanted to suggest what, in his view, was the cause of the loss of stability in the modern world. Much of Book I (*Introduction*) is a discussion of the limitations of Reason—

> this picklock Reason is still a-fumbling at the wards[1]

—and the poet looked to the growth of a *mature* 'accord of Sense, Instinct, Reason and Spirit'[2] (which the Greeks had experienced only in the charming unstable 'grace of childhood') operating through Christ as the WORD OF GOD[3] to bring mankind to stability and peace. Book II (*Selfhood*) and Book III (*Breed*) treat of 'the two Arch-Instincts of man's nature'. With an effort at excessive simplification we might call them (*a*) the self-Self—the self-protective assertive personality; and (*b*) the racial-Self—the impulse towards propagation. Both in II and III, however, the digressions and discussions of incidental matters occupy more space than the topics-in-chief. The reference (in the section discussing pleasure in food) to the voluptuary and epicure who

> indulgeth richly his time untill the sad day come
> when he retireth with stomach Emeritus[4]

[1] I, 463. [2] I, 708 ff. [3] I, 771 ff. [4] III, 118–19.

is a pleasant touch of fun. Humour of a quieter kind also wrinkles the surface of the lines from time to time. Book IV, named *Ethick*, mainly a discourse on the 'sense of Duty in man', leads up to the doctrine that

> In truth 'spiritual animal' wer a term for man
> nearer than 'rational' to define his genus;
> Faith being the humanizer of his brutal passions,
> the clarifier of folly and medicine of care,
> the clue of reality, and the driving motiv
> of thatt self-knowledge which teacheth the ethick of life.[1]

Though in his long retirement near Oxford, Bridges was a Seer on a Hill and not a man of affairs, his eye was as much on the world about him as upon the ancient philosophers, to whom he looked indeed for the light by which present discontents could be illumined—

> See how cross-eyed the pride of our world-wide crusade
> against Nigerian slavery, while the London poor
> in their Victorian slums lodged closer and filthier
> than the outraged alien; and under liberty's name
> our Industry is worse fed and shut out from the sun.—
> In every age and nation a like confusion is found.[2]

Bridges died, aged eighty-five, less than six months after *The Testament of Beauty* was published. In his last poetic utterance he spoke with a voice of serene assurance for the guidance of an age of despair, and if it be a proper extension of the traditional functions of a Laureate to offer healing to a wounded generation, Robert Bridges succeeded fully.

§ 2.—*Younger Traditional Poets: English and American*

The foregoing discussion of Bridges' last poem serves incidentally to clarify the issue in the *Tradition* v. *Experiment*

[1] IV, 1132–37 [2] IV, 356–61.

controversy. The dispute had seemed important for nearly ten years, yet it seemed entirely unimportant after reading *The Testament of Beauty*, which was, at once, (*a*) poetry, (*b*) traditional, and (*c*) experimental. The outlook, temper, and thought are traditional; the form and spelling are partly experimental, partly traditional. But it does not occur to us to commend it or to attack it on the ground that it is either traditional or experimental. Where there is indubitable poetry this issue does not arise. Experimentalism in verse is a protest (not always sound or wisely conducted) against bad traditionalist poetry; and the statement (in opposition to experiment) of a Theory of Traditionalism is often only an *ex parte* defence by bad traditionalist poets. Bad traditionalist poetry and bad experimentalist poetry are, both, bad poetry. The first will be popular because it rings to the skies with customary echoes—most of us like to hear repeatedly the pleasant noises familiar to us; the second will be praised by some because it has the attraction of novelty.

If responsibility for the *Tradition* v. *Experiment* quarrel need be attached to either party, the traditionalists are to blame. True, they were wholly passive until they had been goaded into response; but they had unpacked so much dull stuff on the doorstep of the British Museum that some anti-traditionalist move became extremely necessary. The squabble ended in the way it was bound to end. At length the experimentalists had to ask, 'What's the next new trick to try?' and not being able to think of any other, most of them either gave up poetry altogether or began themselves to write traditionalist poetry.

The first demand to be made of poetry is that it shall furnish some new vision of life. The second and alternative demand (since the first rules out all but the rare great poets) is that it shall furnish some intellectual excitement. Those younger English and American poets to be mentioned in this section satisfy, at their best, the second demand.

Edmund Blunden ought to be the most important poet named here. But is he? Is there in his poetry up to 1930 anything that is certainly better than what was already there in 1920? Loyalty to one's belief in Blunden as a poet makes the negative come reluctantly. Those who care for English poetry and read new poetry keep their faith that they will get up one morning to find that Edmund Blunden has really 'done it'. More: it is hard to believe that he has not already 'done it'; that he has not in his pocket a sheaf of poems he, perversely, will not let us see.

What is this bug that keeps the twentieth-century poets in the shadow of unfulfilled renown?—Blunden, Hodgson, Graves—even Walter de la Mare, who has, like Hodgson, *really* 'done it' in the past and yet seems somehow an arrested genius.

Blunden, perhaps, was too good a poet at the beginning. If *The Waggoner* had appeared in 1930 instead of 1920, and had followed a series of inferior volumes, we should have been more content. He is, we should have said, 'progressing'. As it is, he filled the prose of *Undertones of War* with the essence of poetry, and in the poems placed as an appendix to the book seemed not to maintain the splendid level of the prose.

Throughout the *English Poems* there is no place where ease of utterance is heard; no smoothness, no untroubled melody. Though all the English countryside of earth, air, and water is his familiar scene the pictorial aspect does not satisfy him. Blunden has never been merely a nature poet in the narrow sense of being content to paint external appearances; but in the later poems there is a stronger infusion of those non-physical elements from his own being which he endeavours to incorporate with nature's likeness. His poetry 'is not the fruit of facility. I strive for utterance', he says.[1] And he speaks of its 'half-ideas, verges

[1] Preface to *English Poems*.

of shadows and misty brightness'. This difficult wrestling of the poet with his material no doubt explains why his verse gives such a sense of thwarted achievement—as if some obstruction impeded the fulfilment of genius; an impression to some extent confirmed by the address *To Nature*: [1]

> O my stern mother, aye, in that name loved,
> Who gave me life and all its greenest fields,
> And yet to counterchange the simple joy
> Gave me this brain, whose luck it seems to be
> Ever to labour like a winnowing drudge,
> But blind, unknowing if it beat in vain. . . .

There is a poem by Humbert Wolfe [2] on Humbert Wolfe's poems, in which the poet complains that his true poems are the unwritten ones. The poem his pen actually writes is the discarded husk; it

> is just a poem like any other
> that I have written.
> And I give it a name, and sign it, reluctantly. . . .

That is a little overstated, though it is true that a large number of Wolfe's poems are just like any other that he has written. He himself, in the verses referred to, indicates one or two sources of resemblance, but the likeness does not stop at those. Readers may sometimes suspend their reading of him for a while to wonder whether Humbert Wolfe has not more of the will-to-poetry than of the impulse-to-poetry. More than one poet, as we know, has apparently sat down at a particular moment in his life and said, 'I am going to be a poet.' And the result has sometimes been fortunate. Yet in most such instances the impulse was probably a passionate one, and not only intellectual. It is

[1] In *English Poems*.
[2] 'My Poems', in *This Blind Rose* (1928).

amusing to speculate whether, if we could follow Humbert Wolfe's normal day, we should find that poetry is as much a part of its routine as public service and dinner and bed. Perhaps this theory is wrong, for the writer tells us in another place that, though there have been greater poems than these, and other lovers than this,

> . . . these poems, this love, are what
> the heart is made of.[1]

Whence comes, then, that dissatisfaction which even a cordial admirer may so often experience in reading Humbert Wolfe's poetry? Whence those faint disturbing echoes, now of Byron now of Wilde? Surely from Humbert Wolfe's continual self-conscious watching of what Humbert Wolfe is writing; so that the poet in him rarely gets free from bondage to the intellectual part. As the business man complained to his son from Oxford, 'Too much of this damned culture!' Too much, also, of the kind of poetry that is (in implication, if not in statement) about 'life, listening with a little crooked smile to her heart' and yielding 'to love on a sob'.[2] Not a maudlin sob, but one of those silent dry good-mannered heartrending sobs. There is, in short, too much tension. Poetry should be, for the poet as well as for the reader, a means of release from tension; a means whereby an equilibrium is attained between the poet and the universe or between the reader and the universe. Poetry should give (on another plane) the sensation experienced by a satisfied gourmand when he sinks back and says he is 'at peace with all the world'. Whatever its theme, and its kind or degree of emotion, good poetry provides a release from tension; it gives a sense of peace; and it establishes an equilibrium with the universe. Great

[1] 'As Gold Caesar' (*This Blind Rose*).
[2] 'Venus' (*This Blind Rose*).

poetry may do all this in a miraculous single line, even when there is no precise emotional content :

> Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang.

It is worth while cavilling at Humbert Wolfe's unsatisfying poetry, since he has written a good deal of the more satisfying sort. The fact that he is often a better poet in satire than in other forms of verse, lends support to the argument that tension in his own mind and conscious self-watching are the enemies of his poetry. When he is caught up by strong emotion, the strain on the verse is released and life's 'crookèd smile' and the Wolfean sob are lost in the stream of natural feeling. A 'natural' poet Humbert Wolfe cannot become, because his attachment to cultural habit will always affect his choice of imagery, allusions, and general poetic reference. But here, from *News of the Devil* (a satire on the present-day newspaper magnates) is an example of his verse when emotion is running free :

> Outside my window went
> on steady feet a marching regiment.
> I threw aside the curtain. Shrill and airy,
> they piped 'The long, long way to Tipperary',
> the short, short way to death, and, as they played,
> across the centuries an echo strayed :
> 'Te morituri salutamus'. Yes!
> I saw my chosen gladiators pass
> like Caesar, and like Caesar turned the thumb,
> and heard between the bugle and the drum,
> a Roman crying to our English lad :
> 'We died for Caesar! Wherefore are you dead?'
> and heard the English voice make answer, 'Nay!
> we die to make a Pressman's holiday.'

News of the Devil is a continuous narrative. Usually Humbert Wolfe has chosen to publish his books of verse in

the form of a loosely-linked series of lyrical poems in varying metres. *Requiem* is constructed in this way, and, for sustained poetic quality, is his most successful volume. These two books and *The Uncelestial City* (a long satire, ambitious in range and structure) encourage the hope that his restrictive mannerisms are weakening their hold. His (frequently anarchic) use of imperfect rhymes has been carried to greater length in the last book than previously, and this is possibly a device for breaking down the rigidity to which reference has been made. *Requiem*, a sequence of dramatic monologues, is the least blemished thing that Humbert Wolfe has done. Praise of it must be expressed in that negative manner, in spite of whatever admiration the book may stir, because it leaves a doubt lurking in the mind. Here is a poet who has facility, learning, pity, emotion—but . . . There is always that final *but*. In one of the Nun's monologues in *Requiem*, reference is made to

> the lovely human counterpoint of pain.

Humbert Wolfe has many times taken tragic themes, yet he has not dealt with them in the high spirit of tragedy. He lingers on the 'lovely human counterpoint', and reaches little farther than the romantic-tragic. He lacks the final austerity and emotional discipline which turn transient pity into the immortality of tragedy. Thus it is that the Coda to *Requiem* and several moving passages in *The Uncelestial City* come short of the permanent satisfaction that great poetry gives. One's definite emotional response to Humbert Wolfe's 'moving' poems suggests that he is a sentimentalist for unsentimental people; or it is, perhaps, a simple reminder that word-cadences have a power to stir emotion in complete independence of their sense-significance.

Among the poets of the younger-middle generation,

Charles Williams has the distinction of being an intellectual poet without being an intellectualist. This does not mean that his poetry is less learned or more comprehensible than if he were an intellectualist; but it does mean that his metaphysic is (so far as any metaphysic can be) of virgin birth, and not an illegitimate misbegotten in a garret or studio or drawing-room where poets meet one another and 'get known'. Offsetting his originality of thought and contemplation, however, is the disadvantage that though his Muse is humane she is not human. She will talk, without obvious preference for any one, of Saint Stephen and of tube-stations, of courtesy and of parrots; but she will not talk about them other than metaphysically or theologically. Nothing else could convey to a reader so instructive a glimpse of Charles Williams' mind as the discovery on turning to a poem called *The Parrot* that it is not about a parrot but about the poet's soul. In one sense or another, more or less, each and all his poems are about the poet's soul: and this is as it should be, for a good poet can have no other subject, seeing that every 'subject' is ultimately a state of his own soul. The quality of his poetry will be relative to the quality of his soul. Only when he commits it to the care of Theology has the soul of Charles Williams a seriously diminished interest; and as this happens often it is necessary to make a distinction between the religious verse and the poetry. As religious verse his is better than most; so free from narrow sectarianism that Bunyan, Donne, Herbert, Newman, and Francis Thompson might have had a creditable hand in writing it. But the misfortune of its appearance amid Charles Williams' poetry is that the attachment of his soul to theological doctrine hinders that independent personal contemplation of the universe for which the reach of his mind qualifies him.

With Time and Space for borders
Lest any wave disperse,

Flows forward, without eddy,
The holy universe,
As to its own broad music
Moves a high poet's verse.

But I stand up within it,
In separation clad. . . .[1]

While he is standing up within the universe *in separation clad*, his poetry is worth closer attention than that of most contemporaries. In poetry immediate comprehensibility is usually secured at the cost of immediate exhaustibility: little is asked and little given. Williams' *The Window* [2] is a night piece in fifteen twelve-line stanzas, beginning with the poet and a friend seated at a window overlooking London from a height. The blackness of the city merges into 'the vast vision of our conscious mind . . . the vast unsearchable world, the vast unsearchable soul', and as the poem proceeds the impression is given of Mind contemplating the Unsearchable and penetrating it so far as to receive sensations that can be expressed only in language suggesting sensation and not coherent meaning:

Before whose coming what fear shakes the air,
What portent? Feel'st thou 'neath our topmost tread,
Noisome and too much laden with its dead
The whole mound tremble? Life that builded it
Faints in her task, and all the marvellous stair
Time shall see crash; the works begin to slide
And cracks of chaos open on each side;
Thought, living, looks into the bottomless pit,
Shudders o'er precipices of despair,
Shafts of destruction; Being is torn apart,
Feel'st thou the terror leaping in thy heart?
All's rent, all breaks, and Nothing is laid bare.

Somewhere among Charles Williams' writings is a poem

[1] 'At a Tube Station' (in *Windows of Night*).
[2] In *Windows of Night*.

called *The Chaste Wanton*, which, by justifying the first aspect of its title more than the second, typifies his poetry collectively: it is all chastity and no wantonness—mind without blood. His personal experience may have been (as his poems on love, marriage, and children suggest) other than bloodless, yet it is all transposed to the plane of metaphysics; just as in his novel, *War in Heaven*, he has written a metaphysical 'thriller'. But the point to note here is that he has written a novel which is not only metaphysical (though it is that mainly) but also a *thriller*. And this is Charles Williams' achievement in poetry, also. Let him be as intellectual as he will, he is not dull—unless when he is theological or Arthurian. His verse includes *A Myth of Shakespeare*—providing a blank-verse framework for a performance of Shakespearean scenes. This is the most nearly 'human' thing he has done, and it makes Shakespeare a credible man. Raleigh's fine speech in the *Myth*, defining poetry, begins with a sentence which can be quoted with some confidence as a statement of the idea of poetry expressed by Williams' own verse:

> Poetry is
> A state of knowledge, and a means to find
> All men's experiencing faculties
> And that which they experience.

'Gladys Cromwell was born November 28, 1885, in New York. . . . In January, 1918, Gladys and Dorothea, her twin sister . . . sailed for France and were stationed at Chalons. . . . At the end of their labours they gave way to hopelessness. . . . After the armistice . . . on their way home, they jumped from the deck of the *Lorraine*. . . . After their death, which occurred January 19, 1919, the French Government awarded the two sisters the Croix

de Guerre.' [1] These extracts from a biographical sketch of a young American poet are not made as a prelude to any comment on Gladys Cromwell's poetry, but because they exhibit in the briefest, simplest, and most 'realistic' way a common mode in the decade of despair. Those who experienced this blight as their inheritance from the War, found relief in most instances in other ways than suicide; some in fortitude and good works; others in light but leaden-spirited gaiety, or in bitter speech and writing. The wonder is not that so many War-books were written, but that the signs of the War are not more frequently evident in post-War literature. Gladys Cromwell's 'way out', and bare mention of Alan Seeger's *I Have a Rendezvous with Death*, may stand here as a reminder that young American poets as well as prose-writers [2] felt the same touch of horror as writers in Europe.

Edna St. Vincent Millay's *Poems* was first published in England in 1923, some years after her work had brought her recognition in America. Read at a sitting the volume has a repetitive sameness of mood that dulls the force of individual poems, and as she has apparently caught the infection of lyrical pessimism from Housman and Hardy, some may feel an understandable reluctance to have to admit a third among the sons of darkness, notwithstanding that the third is a woman and American. Yet she must be admitted, for she *is* a poet, independently of her Housmanesque and Hardyesque verses. Though her *Renascence* is not in the least in Francis Thompson's style, it is one of the few poems of its particular kind that would not look stunted beside *The Hound of Heaven*. Metaphysical poetry, no doubt, is *pure* poetry only when it keeps its own elevated unemotionalized level and makes no concession to average mentality. *Renascence* is emotionalized metaphysics, and it is popular

[1] *Modern American Poetry*, edited by Louis Untermeyer.

[2] e.g., Ernest Hemingway, E. E. Cummings, and William Faulkner.

(not popularized) in the sense of being within the general mental range. In rather more than two hundred lines it registers the sensations of a soul pressed down by Infinity to annihilation:

> And so beneath the weight lay I
> And suffered death, but could not die.

Then the experience of interment and next the uprising:

> . . . all at once the heavy night
> Fell from my eyes and I could see—
> A drenched and dripping apple-tree,
> A last long line of silver rain,
> A sky grown clear and blue again.
> And as I looked a quickening gust
> Of wind blew up to me and thrust
> Into my face a miracle
> Of orchard-breath. . . .

When poets incline to concentrate upon the representation of noble suffering—and Edna Millay does this a little—there is a wickedly gleeful inverted joy in watching them slip (as they certainly will at heaven's appointed time) into appalling, incredible, unholy bathos. 'Listen, children':

> Listen, children:
> Your father is dead.
> From his old coats
> I'll make you little jackets;
> I'll make you little trousers
> From his old pants. . . .[1]

Well, well! . . . After all, Wordsworth might have written that. And how much duller poetry would be if there were no really bad poems. And who will begrudge Edna St. Vincent Millay *her* bad poems when there is not only

[1] From 'Lament' (*Poems*).

Renascence but also the five *Unnamed Sonnets*, and the *Bluebeard* sonnet with its grasp of the need for the one final locked door of personality:

> This door you might not open, and you did; . . .
> Yet this alone out of my life I kept
> Unto myself, lest any know me quite. . . .

America's younger traditional poets are less interesting than many who belong to the rather older middle generation, because they have returned to English models, and communicate an experience of the universe no different from that the English traditionalists communicate. For this reason, Elinor Wylie's graceful, finished, polished, charming verse is just what the four adjectives suggest, and little more. In its kind it is good, but the kind is flat and undistinguished; whereas (among the rather-olders) Robert Frost adds to experience an authentic 'something' that has never quite been given in English poetry; and Carl Sandburg's *Fog* is (using the word precisely) a masterpiece:

> The fog comes
> on little cat feet.
>
> It sits looking
> over harbor and city
> on silent haunches
> and then moves on.

This (to restate a point previously made) is neither traditionalist poetry nor experimentalist poetry, but *poetry*. Write it out as two sentences in prose arrangement and it demands to be restored to a non-prose form. It has rhythm, the only factor distinguishing free verse from prose, though not a *defined* rhythm, because its theme (tenuous, drifting, evasive fog) requires as fluid a rhythm as can be had. The poem does unquestionably communicate a new experience,

and it is as good an example as could be found of the difference between description (Art as Imitation) and impressionism (Art as Communication). Fogs do *not* come on little cat feet; they do *not* sit on silent haunches. Therefore, descriptively, the poem is not 'true'. But it is essentially true, and as soon as the poem is heard the listener (a familiarity with fogs being assumed) gives instinctive assent, and in many instances will wish ruefully that he had been able to record his own impression 'like that'.[1] And surely, at bottom, the appreciation of poetry begins (though it does not end) with the RECOGNITION *of a truth* (or fact, or thing) *presented anew in exciting language.*

There are those who hold that true poetry most frequently consists in illumination of the commonplace. Returning from America to England, we find this theory justified anew in Victoria Sackville-West's poetry—first in her *Orchard and Vineyard* and later in *The Land,* a long descriptive and meditative poem which does solidly for the Weald of Kent what Edmund Blunden might have done more brilliantly, though hardly with the same singleness of purpose. *The Land* is completely admirable because it attempts no more than is within the author's power to achieve confidently. The persistent and inestimable commonplaces of the English country seasonal round are surveyed under the perceptive eye of an observer saturated

[1] I write with more than personal confidence in the accuracy of this view of a listener's response, because (not for the premeditated purpose of this book) I read *Fog* to two separate assemblies (English) without making any suggestion as to their probable or 'proper' reactions, and without asking for any subsequent expression of opinion. Several members in both audiences, however, were definitely and spontaneously excited by the poem; and one of the enthusiasts was an elderly lady who, usually, does not like 'all this modern stuff'.—A.C.W.

in the essence of England. She has no patent philosophical purpose and does not strive after any metaphysical vision. The earth to her is earth, beautiful enough but an exacting mistress :

> the man who works the wet and weeping soil
> Down in the Weald, must marl and delve and till
> His three-horse land, fearing nor sweat nor droil.
> For through the winter he must fight the flood,
> The clay, that yellow enemy, that rots
> His land, sucks at his horses' hooves
> So that his waggon plunges in the mud,
> And wheels revolve, but waggon never moves. . . .

Maurice Hewlett's *Song of the Plow* is a minor epic of the English agricultural labourer; *The Land* is an unsentimentalized record of the English farmer's year, *felt* as the practical farmer would feel it, rather than seen as a romantic town-dweller might attempt to see it : ' the land ' of day-labour, not of week-ends and summer holidays. The style is, in the most part, as pedestrian as fits the theme, though there is always evidence that this is England seen under the light of a poet's vision—a vision, however, deliberately physical : eyesight, not soul-sight. Yet (without qualification) this is England, and whoever reads *The Land* with remembering attention will know England better afterward than before.

§ 3.—*The Novel : Toward Stability*

Impatience with the extremes of experimentation in literature may be due to little more than older people's reluctance to readjust their outlook to the focus preferred by another generation. However sympathetic elders may be at heart it is troublesome to make such readjustments—how troublesome, the young scarcely realize. Literary experimentation in the past ten or twenty years has been tremendously

interesting; it has also shaken a whole army of rigid conventions—and that in itself is of value. But are the various experiments likely to be fruitful for the future? It is evident that some traditionalists have been uneasy about their tradition; and some disgusted with it or in despair about it. Joseph Conrad was in essentials a traditional novelist; and yet it was in escaping from the confines of tradition that he was great. He was in the ship of tradition, but the ship made new and strange and wonderful journeys—not in space, but in the exploration of character. Lord Jim is an instance. In the portrait of Jim, Conrad did something more toward exploring and revealing character than had been done. And he did it through the disjointed fragmentary method of narration which, irritating at first, is exactly right for its purpose. Conrad was, thus far, an experimenter; but, unlike some contemporary experimentalists, he knew what he wanted to do and for what end he was aiming. Moreover, his experiments did not shake his fundamental regard for tradition; they extended the range of tradition.

The success of Conrad, and the source of the unusual alliance of respect and affection he stirs, is due to his ability to suggest the complexity and incalculability of men and women, without destroying their plain humanity. In comparison with Conrad only, most other novelists who worked contemporaneously with him seem insignificant. If the causes of this relative insignificance are sought, some (at least partial) understanding may be reached of the traditionalists' disgust with tradition. If evidence of the existence of that disgust is called for, the opening of Hugh Walpole's *Hans Frost* can be cited. No one can question that Hugh Walpole's books are representative of present-day serious traditional fiction. They are large and solid and painstaking; there is careful, urbane writing; a social atmosphere almost opaque in its solidity; figures of men and

women held in that atmosphere. Hugh Walpole's world is a pleasant enough world, but somehow desperately unsatisfying; as unsatisfying to us (and to him?) as Hans Frost's books were to Hans Frost.

After the delegation of fellow authors had left him with their presentation gift on his seventieth birthday, Hans Frost went to his library and stood in front of the collected edition of his own novels, poems, and essays:

> He looked at them with dispassionate eyes. Such a number and, for the most part, having so little to do with him! How many of them retained any life for him still? . . . for the most part how thin, how touchingly shadowy, how, as they looked at him, they seemed to beseech him not to forget them, because if he did not remember them who in heaven's name would?

A desolating picture. A world full of books no one will remember much longer than last Sunday's crumpets for tea. Books consumed as mutton is consumed, and leaving behind no further memory. Hans Frost had been a Foreign Office clerk and 'he wrote by accident. He had no fervour, no inspiration, no heated blood'; and now he is seventy; but not too old, because there is still to be for him that experience which is equivalent to heated blood and which prepares him for the 'final grand shudder of ecstasy' which, on the last page of the novel, comes 'crashing, tumbling down' as the voice of creative energy cries in his ears, 'Now—BEGIN.' So . . . Hans Frost starts to write his next book.

Is there behind the irony with which Hugh Walpole describes the presentation, a still, small discontent with the safe traditional kind of writing that becomes, in the end, little more than mechanical habit? Experimenters do find, from time to time, some new thing worth finding. A good traditional writer who lacks the superabundant power of genius, is a refiner, a polisher, a perfecter. In the work

of Galsworthy and Bennett the English novel—refined, polished, perhaps perfected—came right to the buffers of a literary terminus beyond which there is no road; there is only, behind, the road of return.

Consider all that these writers and their predecessors have said in their books. And consider the vast amount unsaid. It was all very well for Thackeray to say that *Tom Jones* was the last book in which an author had been allowed to give a full portrait of a man. The compliment was inspired more by generosity than by fact. *Tom Jones* is a magnificent novel, and Tom Jones is as full a portrait as it was possible to paint in the eighteenth century. But the portrait does not give as full satisfaction as it gave to Thackeray. Man and Woman are different creatures in the eyes of twentieth-century observers from what they appeared to be in the last century and in that preceding. Wider and in some instances deeper knowledge of psychology, psycho-analysis, biology, physics, and metaphysics have, for good or ill, changed the outlook. The shifting attitude towards marriage has in itself caused an important change of balance in human relations, and has therefore served also to modify humanity. These and other considerations make it increasingly difficult for the novel to continue in the traditional path. Novelists nowadays are writing about partly-new creatures, and in order to present these as fully as may be, variations of method are sought. Traditional novels were, for long, content to deal with the husk of life. The people in them often resemble African millipedes, innumerable strange creatures that live and move and have their being, and yet are hollow inside. If they have organs, the organs are neatly packed away out of sight.

Is Soames Forsyte (for instance) really much more than this? How astonishingly little we know of his emotional life. How much more quickly we *might* become reconciled to Soames if the ultimate marital clash with Irene were

not passed over so discreetly. Such matters are shattering forces in human relationships. Is the novel for ever to pass by on the other side with eyes and nose averted? May it not be allowed to face all truths and to sanitate where sanitation is required?

The revolting parts of Joyce's *Ulysses* are those dealing with what may be called, in a convenient euphemism, the physiological mechanics of the human body. The treatment of these things in imaginative literature is indefensible not only on the (shaky) ground of good taste, which differs from person to person, but also because no emotional significance is involved. But in the treatment of emotional relationships in their twofold aspect—the physical and the metaphysical—the English novel has not yet learned to walk (D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is deficient in metaphysical interest). The English novel will not have grown up until it can deal with every single facet of *significant* human experience dispassionately. Too many competent novels have distorted life (even if only by omission) in the service of propriety; while novelists who have set out 'to tell the truth', as they say, have too often told only an indecent half-truth, and have told it as if they were smirking, leering, nasty-minded schoolboys.

In *The Water Gipsies* A. P. Herbert did more for the welfare of the English novel than has been done for years. This is a 'pleasant' book, rich with humour, pitiful, 'true', and as free from prudery as from indecency. The amount of fundamental truth in *The Water Gipsies* must be, for some people, staggering. Lily Bell, who is 'ruined' and enjoys it, does not go to the bad, nor is she abandoned, nor does the author either frown upon her or exalt her. The thing happens, she continues to lead a comfortable and moderately quiet life, and she is a pleasanter person in her everyday self after than before. A. P. Herbert takes living virtuously and living-in-sin for what they are actually—

two kinds of behaviour. Some behave in the one way, some in the other; there are no *inevitable* consequences of the one or of the other. Of those who live virtuously some are unhappy, some happy. The same is true of those who live in sin. When Jane's husband is drowned, Jane is represented as feeling exactly as that Jane would have felt in those special circumstances. When Bryan the artist, half inclined to satisfy Jane's long desire for 'one night of love', turns away along the hotel corridor to go to his own room, he behaves as that man (and more other men than is commonly supposed) would have behaved. Herbert's integrity in *The Water Gipsies* is remarkable Faced with half-a-dozen urgent temptations to falsify in the name (*a*) of morality, (*b*) of sex interest, (*c*) of romance, (*d*) of pity—he declines to be a party to any deliberate manipulation of truth for any purpose whatsoever. The canal and country scenes, and the skittles match, are splendid. The book falters now and again when the author drops into his one bad habit of generalizing about social classes, and it is strange that a man who is often so right about individual members of a class should go so far wrong as A. P. Herbert can go when he is thinking of a class in the mass.

The Water Gipsies is, in form, entirely traditional, but if the English novel is to grow up and is really to take Life as its province, it may need a more flexible technique than has yet been employed. Still, the traditional form does provide a serviceable basis for the new fiction of the future, since every novelist requires a recognizable story, narrated coherently, with characters clearly defined (not nebulous). And he cannot afford to ignore the necessity for ruthless selection in his choice of material—selection mainly according to *aesthetic* principles. But within those traditional boundaries there will be much to add to what is now admitted. Possibly, in the future the English novel will not be written according to any single one of the present

recognized 'methods', but as a combination of several methods. Characters will need to become at least occasionally autobiographical—for no one but oneself can see one's inward self; though, as only few people understand their inward selves, the method of the omniscient narrator has still a use for interpreting those inward selves to the reader.

There is a passage in *Hans Frost* where the novelist, feeling himself imprisoned within the safe walls of literary competence, is moved by a passionate envy of those freer souls outside upon whom this blight of competence has not fallen:

> Jane Rose looked like the wife of a Pre-Raphaelite painter, her dark hair brushed back in waves from her forehead, her grey dress cut in simple fashion, her thin pale face quiet and remote. She was, Hans thought, the best living novelist in England. She wrote the most beautiful prose in the most beautiful way. Her three novels, *The Haycock*, *Garland's Passage* and *The Cattle Boat* were lovely, wonderful things. Oh! if he could write like that, if he could observe and remember like that, if he could translate on to the page pity and irony and tenderness and humour like that! . . . But he could not. Here was a gulf between her generation and his fixed! Never, never, try as he might, could he win her lovely revelation of human nature, unwitting that it should be revealed.[1]

'Oh, if he could write like that. . . . But he could not. Here was a gulf between her generation and his fixed! Never, never, try as he might, could he win her lovely revelation of human nature.' . . . He knows himself to be (as a novelist) civilized, urbane, safe; he knows also that beauty is uncivilized, pagan, a rebel. He is imprisoned in the tower of competence; beauty is free and capricious as wind in the grass; lovely, but agonizing in her loveliness.

Is the future of the English novel to be found in the

[1] If for 'Jane Rose' we substitute 'Virginia Woolf' this passage may be read as a fine tribute to the living woman.

past? Will novelists be content to return to the ample bosom of Dickens as J. B. Priestley has in *The Good Companions*, or to the tradition of Scott as in Hugh Walpole's *Rogue Herries*? The success of *The Good Companions* proves nothing so far as the future of the novel is concerned. It is no depreciation of Priestley's book to say that it would be a misfortune for present-day fiction if his example sent novelists back in headlong pursuit of 'the fine nineteenth-century tradition'. J. B. Priestley had the wit and the vigour to write a twentieth-century variant of the Pickwickian novel: solid, workmanlike, honest-to-goodness entertainment. Its value is equivalent to that of good beer, good beef and bread and cheese, good blood, red cheeks, brawny muscles, and jolly laughter—indispensable things. We neither can nor wish to be without them. Only a curmudgeon could fail to enjoy and be grateful for *The Good Companions*; but *The Water Gipsies*, while giving an equivalent robust physical satisfaction, has more significance as an interpretation of vital human experience and social interrelations—these are ugly phrases, but they relate to things that are quite other than ugly in A. P. Herbert's novel.

Perhaps the immediate future of the English novel lies with the women writers. At least, it very well might if more women writers would develop the confidence of their distinctive vision and unique opportunities. English people have never altogether ceased to gape at the woman novelist; their critical attitude toward her has never been accurately balanced. And she herself has never taken herself quite naturally. Though they complain that men continually regard them from the standpoint of functional difference and consider them intellectually as a distinct race, cultured women have never in any general way taken the strong line of demonstrating their virtual equality (if not superiority) *as women*. A feminist surely weakens what should

be her unassailable position when she says to a man, 'I'm as good a man as you are. I can do almost anything you can do, and as well as you can do it.' It is all true, no doubt; but it is, finally, irrelevant. If she would shed her own restrictive sex-consciousness (for which past masculine suppression was, we may readily admit, responsible) and develop those special faculties in which she is, not the equal of man, but obviously and necessarily his superior, because he cannot compete, there might be much more good work and there would be much less wasteful fiction.

Using the adjective in its philosophic sense, a good woman and a good man are of equal human value; as a good miner and a good school-teacher are of equal human value. But it is foolishness when the miner insists that he is as good a school-teacher as the teacher is, or vice versa; and foolishness, also, when the woman insists that she is as good a man as the man is. Yet this is what, in effect, women novelists have been doing for generations past—either by taking masculine or neuter names; or by striving after an appearance of masculinity in their writing.

> To-day if any lady in her boudoir rhymeth,
> she is drown'd in man's tradition and disguiseth her tone,
> transposing her high music to the lower clef. . . .[1]

When women writers take to being masculine, they usually become more like men than men ever were. When dealing with 'violent' subjects, for instance, they tend to display less literary discipline and control than men use.

Though her 'attitude' may displease some modern women, Jane Austen remains in many respects the model for women writers. No one but a woman could have maintained that exquisite firmness of line. If she quivers, it is an intellectual quiver—a half-raised eyebrow, a barbed word.

[1] Robert Bridges: *The Testament of Beauty*, III, 403 ff.

Life could not humbug her, for she was a realist (as every intelligent woman is), not taken-in by the shows of life. Jane Austen's clear sight, reasonable tolerance, delicacy of touch, and unwavering firmness of line give her pre-eminence—and in this province of deliberately quiet social satire no man can ever hope to equal her. Here, then, is a field in which women will almost certainly continue to do better than men; as they can also in the representation of passion; as they might in the portrayal of children; and as they should in the 'family chronicle' novel. Already, in this last category, G. B. Stern's *The Tents of Israel* is a better example than Galsworthy's *The Forsyte Saga*. She suggests, as Galsworthy does not, the sense of multitude and the texture of family life. Hers is a family—a unit; his an aggregation of persons.

Tennyson Jesse's novels are remarkable for their extraordinary richness and animation. She never comes within distance of suggesting, as other contemporaries do, that the novel is a thin smear of words covering an annoyingly limited experience. Her books are more intensely alive and varied than those of any other woman now writing in England. *The Lacquer Lady* is a threefold success—for the strange beauty and terror of the Burmese scenes, for the first and final chapters at Brighton, and for the character of Fanny, who is good enough to take tea with Becky Sharp. *Tom Fool*, though it may not have the richness of *The Lacquer Lady*, is a more brilliantly original book; perhaps with an occasional more-than-masculine touch, but—both as a sound novel and (in its earlier part) as a piece of successful experimentation—certainly an outstanding novel of the nineteen-twenties.

CHAPTER V

SCOURGERS AND SCAVENGERS OF SOCIETY

§ 1.—*D. H. Lawrence*

NO one has written books so consistently tormented as those of D. H. Lawrence, nor so varied in their quality and degree of torment. He ranges from the impressive majesty of a Titan wrestling in caverns of darkness, on through the crude spleen of a Cockney errand boy putting his fingers to his nose, down to the peevishness of a fretful infant in the agonies of teething. He was among the most difficult of all modern authors for a reader to get on easy terms with, on account of certain obvious absurdities of vocabulary and style, and also because he was, in later years, so angered by the pundits of literature and morals, that controversy dissipated much of the energy that should have been reserved for creation. Lawrence was a bad controversialist. It is possible to be in full agreement with his case in principle and yet be uneasily conscious that he is playing into his opponents' hands through his angry waywardness—as when he perversely suggests [1] the existence of pornographic tendencies in *Jane Eyre* and other works admired by those who attacked his own work on the ground of its alleged indecency. While his too early death in 1930 (at the age of forty-four) was a disaster to English literature, for Lawrence had just reached the full height of his powers, the withdrawal of his own explosive personality enables his books now to be considered in a calmer atmosphere, above the tumult of controversy.

[1] *Pornography and Obscenity* (Criterion Miscellany, No. 5), p. 11.

'The one persistent purpose of his life—to revolutionize the modern attitude towards sex—became stronger towards the end, and in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928) he finally threw off such restraints of convention as had hitherto kept his purpose in leash. 'To a considerable extent that book (beautiful and fierily clean though it is) defeats his purpose. If, as Lawrence believed, 'the majority of people are sexually ill through generations of misdirection of a vital force, a period of moral convalescence must ensue before they can be cured.' But Lawrence would not consent to be persuasive in public argument, nor would he stop to consider convalescents. 'He could envisage no intermediate stage between moral sickness and complete moral health.' To put *Lady Chatterley's Lover* into general circulation would be as ill-considered as to feed an exhausted fever patient on rumpsteak and beer. This is not said in defence of the police censorship of books. Though the consequences of banning *Lady Chatterley* are supportable, the reasons are indefensible, for they demonstrate as nothing else could the need of that fundamental change of attitude toward sex for which Lawrence worked. 'He wanted to rid mankind of the shame complex which causes too many men and women to associate sex activity always with the idea of indecency; that to Lawrence was blasphemy—a denial and abasement of the central fire of life. 'I want men and women,' he wrote [1], 'to be able to think sex, fully, completely, honestly and cleanly.' He wanted sex to be the source through which comes the pure central fire of life. It maddened him that sex should be bedraggled and trailed through mud and shame. He deplored the dualism of the modern habit—the setting up of dividing barriers between mind and body, between brain and blood. He protested against the grey puritanism which desires to make the body prisoner of the mind: 'I have always inferred that sex meant

[1] *A Propos of Lady Chatterley's Lover.*

blood-sympathy and blood-contact. Technically this is so. But as a matter of fact, nearly all modern sex is a pure matter of nerves, cold and bloodless.' [1]

Some writers who have commented appreciatively on *Lady Chatterley's Lover* have disapproved Lawrence's attempt in that book to rescue certain words from their modern usage as gutter language and restore them to their function as part of the vocabulary of physical love. The need of a secret vocabulary in this relation is realized and conceded, even by those who deplore Lawrence's selection of words; but their objection to the terms used is a matter largely of philological interest. How is the debasement of language to be stayed if words illegitimately annexed for gutter use are to be left dirtily in the gutter? Both on philological and psychological grounds there is a better case to be made for this particular feature in Lawrence's novel than critics have yet allowed.[2]

The least satisfactory side of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is the author's failure to choose a straightforward love theme for the illustration of his theory of sex. There is too much side-tracking of the central theme in the interests of the 'accidentals'. The Michaelis episode, the War paralysis of Sir Clifford, the difference of social rank between Connie and Mellors the gamekeeper are complications which obscure Lawrence's plea for frank and joyous normality in physical love. 'Marriage,' he said elsewhere, 'is the clue to human life,' and he might have written (better than anyone else of his generation) a great novel about passionate succcessful marriage. No English novelist has yet given a full and balanced representation of marriage in all its complex and subtle interactions. In his novels before *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, D. H. Lawrence often seemed to be obsessed

[1] Ibid.

[2] See discussion of this matter in preface to *Soldier Songs and Slang* (Scholartis Press, 1930); and in *Life and Letters*, May 1930, pp. 384ff. (*Notes on D. H. Lawrence* by Desmond MacCarthy).

with the satanic element in marriage. Though passionate love is often partnered with a dark ghost that may haunt the lovers, Lawrence hardly gave free play to what may be called the angelic element in marriage. He was, indeed, guilty of considerable falsification in robbing love of most of its romantic interest. Ecstasy and intensity whether of love or hate are, of course, agonizing—and Lawrence properly represented that agony of spirit. What may be missed in his novels, however, is any sufficient recognition of the further fact that love can be quite as often extraordinarily pleasant. On the whole, even for intelligent people, love properly provides much more pleasure than agony. The pity is that the romantic attitude toward love and marriage has led many to expect all pleasure; and, for these, Lawrence's books should be salutary. Undoubtedly, he makes his lovers writhe too much, but the degree of falsification involved does not go nearer to the entirely satanic than romantic writers have gone to the purely angelic. There is in his novels far and away too much about loins and maleness, and dark spaces, and strange radiant pain, even though he may employ such phrases with an additional symbolic value. It is certainly true that however traditionally Lawrence might use words *as* words, when they become part of the texture of his writing the words are charged with new power, new significance, often with new beauty. Much less than proper justice has yet been done to the rare and exquisite beauty often found in Lawrence's prose, both in passages of natural description and in such pages as those in *The Rainbow* which speak at length of Anna's approaching motherhood.[1]

To deal with the stylistic quality of Lawrence's writing is not esay, for though he was remarkably practised and experienced, he hated any appearance of professionalism. He was a professional author who tried to preserve the mark

[1] Ch. VI: Anna Victrix.

of the amateur. 'He despises fine writing even where it would best suit his purpose,'[1] but though this resulted sometimes in an apparent want of care and finish in his books, it did at the same time preserve him from that bugbear of smooth and almost absentminded competence which is the bane of present-day traditional novelists.

This characteristic distrust of mere literary competence may also account in part for the sameness of atmosphere and mood in the majority of Lawrence's novels and short stories. However different the people and the scene may be, the books are always so tinged by Lawrence's own personality that any differentiation of the fictional characters is almost entirely lost. Yet this sameness is very different from the uniformity of a barren traditionalism dealing with an entirely static world, and with puppet-figures having no interior life. Lawrence's world is dynamic. It could not be otherwise, considering the tremendous energy which runs through his writing and is continuously upheaving the surface. He says somewhere that if you write about anything you should write about it *hot*. Everything that Lawrence wrote is full of convulsive energy and furious fire. He would seem consistently like a Titan amid chaos, if it were not that his voice of angry protest sometimes thinned out to peevish shrillness.

He is refreshing and energizing because, at his best, he was such a good hater: good healthy hate, directed against properly hateable things, is a stirring passion. His hatred was aimed, principally, at the lust for money and at 'modern' love. First and last, the really important factor in his work is the love factor.

'*Is* there any other inspiritional force than the force of love?' . . . 'There is no other, Love makes the trees flower and shed their seed, love makes the animals mate and birds put on their best feather, and sing their best songs. And all that man has ever created on the face

[1] Bonamy Dobree: *The Lamp and the Lute.*

of the earth, or ever will create—if you will allow me the use of the word create, with regard to man's highest productive activities.' [1]

He wanted love to be strongly animal—though not bestial and not lustful. He was scornful of the modern tendency which aimed to spiritualize and to intellectualize love—to make the body the tool or toy of the mind. It is easy to misinterpret this doctrine, and to declare that it would bring us back soon to grovelling animalism. Lawrence did not desire that, and he was not afraid of it. He sought to recover the primal energy of Eden.

The conflict between Man and Woman, peculiar to his books, is a conflict based largely upon the idea that civilized woman has become essentially the antagonist of man, drawing from him his greatest possession—his manhood, his masculinity—and in course of time feminizing him and bringing him under the control of her will. In *Aaron's Rod* he makes one of the characters say, speaking of woman in general:

I hate her, when she knows, and when she *wills*. I hate her when she will make of me that which serves her desire. She may love me, she may be soft and kind to me, she may give her life to me. But why? Only because I am *hers*.

And again:

Women are the very hottest hell once they get the start of you. There's *nothing* they won't do to you, once they've got you. Nothing they won't do to you. Especially if they love you.

There is much more of this anti-feminine frenzy in *Aaron's Rod* and other of Lawrence's books. It is not an exaggeration to call it frenzy, and it seemed at times only just to escape becoming a form of dementia. Yet there is at the heart of it a terrible clear-sightedness—an almost terrifying

[1] *Kangaroo*.

revelation of the closeness of love and hate, of creation and destruction. Lawrence was particularly interested in birds and beasts, with whom creation and death may sometimes be almost simultaneous. Birth—love—the new creation—death. It was in this sequence that Lawrence saw the universe moving. Of this sequence, he seemed to feel, man is the victim. All things moving toward creation and re-creation; and, amid this process, man the instrument of creation—to be devitalized when he has served his immediate end. Almost all Lawrence's books are tuned to record the rebellious bitter cry of *man the instrument.*

No other writer in the twentieth century, so far, arouses such hope of unlimited fruitful influence upon human progress.

The discussion of sex fills to-day the place of religious controversy in the times of Mill, Carlyle, and Huxley. It needed the same kind of courage to speak one's mind about Christianity then as to-day about sex; and the topic has the same kind of vital interest for all who ask themselves the question, How ought I to live? . . .

Lawrence's burning seriousness alone enabled him to accomplish what he did, and what he did has made it easier for those who follow to take into poetry and literature the whole of life.[1]

D. H. Lawrence was a genius of high order, though a lop-sided genius—over-sensitive to the attacks of his critics, and so tormented by the necessity of rousing men and women to a full consciousness of the *serious* importance of creative energy expressed through sex, that he under-estimated the love-value of playful and pure delight.

§ 2.—*Aldous Huxley*

Dickens and Aldous Huxley, looking out upon the world of their own different times, each saw a spectacle which

[1] Desmond MacCarthy in *Life and Letters*, May 1930, pp. 392, 305.

appeared excessively unpleasant. For Dickens, the unpleasantness was mainly concentrated in social injustice, which he 'showed up' with an immense heartiness in which everything was emphatically stated, and in which there was no room for fine shading or modulation. Villains were villains and heroes heroes—and never the twain could meet. Moreover (and it is here that the special difference is shown between the nineteenth-century novelist's method and that of the twentieth-century novelist), Dickens was plainly an advocate and he employed all the devices of the advocate: pathos, exaggeration, sentiment. In addition he would on occasion mount the bench, sit in the judge's seat and pass sentence. The novelists of our own day have (some of them) endeavoured to cultivate a faculty for which Dickens and other nineteenth-century novelists would have had no use—the faculty of *detachment*. Dickens, acting as counsel for the prosecution, presented his case with passion, and made it evident beyond doubt that he was on the side of virtue.

As Aldous Huxley looked out upon the nineteen-twenties, his attention was not engaged by the spectacle of social injustice, but by the flux of social relationships among supposedly cultured people. It is the interior life—the life of the mind, and that part of life in which moral principle operates—that interests Aldous Huxley more than the external life where class clashes with class. But if he sees anything he dislikes, he (in common with other present-day writers) does not say in so many words that he dislikes it; he does not anticipate the reader's judgment by hastening to condemn and pass sentence. The present-day novelist is inclined to leave moral judgment to his readers. It is *revelation* and not *condemnation* that he accepts as his task. As a result of this change in the novelist's self-assumed function, the present-day reader is sometimes disposed to misjudge and misinterpret his author. When the author writes dispassionately of evil, the reader sometimes (usually

quite unwarrantably) identifies the author with the evil. 'Aldous Huxley writes about decadent people; therefore Aldous Huxley is a decadent writer.' If that conclusion is sound, let us at least be logical: 'Edgar Wallace writes about crooks and murderers; therefore Edgar Wallace is a crook and a murderer.' . . .

The decadent writer, the immoral writer, is he (or she, for it is usually a she) who covers decadence and immorality with a veil of glamour and sensational allure. If in Aldous Huxley's books the wages of sin is not death, at least the wages of sin is a perpetual feast of Dead Sea fruit from which clean death would be a desirable release. Moralists in the Middle Ages never made their Seven Sins half so deadly as they are made by Aldous Huxley, even though he may not be in the deliberate sense a moralist. But if the purpose of moralists is to dissuade men from evil courses, Aldous Huxley can confidently be backed against any of them as a dissuader. There was never a more overwhelming 'tract for the times' than *Point Counter Point*. Compared with it, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* is a sunny romance. Compared with the London depicted in *Point Counter Point*, the City of Destruction is a health resort inhabited by Perfectionists. Spandrell is a terrifying object-lesson of Nature's revenge upon the sensualist. On the evidence of this one book, it might be said that Aldous Huxley is the most shattering satirist in English literature since Swift. It is, at any rate, necessary to turn back to *Gulliver's Travels* for passages to compare with some in *Point Counter Point* for cold vitriolic savagery. If Aldous Huxley falls far below the level of Swift, it is because Swift commanded, also, a weapon of irony as smooth as polished steel, as sharp and sinister as a stiletto. In other books Aldous Huxley shows that he is capable of irony, but he uses it chiefly in lighter passages, and it does not illumine the sombre pages of *Point Counter Point*. This satire on contemporary themes is written in

the discontinuous manner to which readers are now accustomed, and the writing is brilliant. The analysis of the character of the young intellectual journalist, Walter Bidlake, is mercilessly acute in its penetration, and in its ruthless refusal to allow Bidlake to find false shelter behind any of the feebly pleasant subterfuges which moral weaklings invent for the deception of themselves and others. Aldous Huxley shirks nothing, and does not in any degree temper this moral east wind out of consideration for the shorn lamb. If the suggested comparison between Swift and Aldous Huxley is followed up, the deficiencies will not be found all on one side. Though Huxley does not handle such bitter consuming irony as Swift's, he has a sense of impish comedy, a Puck-like humour, to which Swift was a stranger. Humour was too gentle and too genial for Swift; he needed a weapon with teeth and claws.

Aldous Huxley was still a young man when *Point Counter Point* was published, but that book might be taken as an indication that by the end of the nineteen-twenties he had sunk into settled despair about his own generation. Yet his disgust and despair are not vented against human life as such, but only against the distortion of life he observes around him. So far, Aldous Huxley appears to have seen human beings in three likenesses: *men like clowns* (*Crome Yellow*); '*men like satyrs*' (*Antic Hay*); *men like demons* (*Point Counter Point*). In *Those Barren Leaves* he shows considerable gaiety and sense of comedy, and provides a deal of fun which is both malicious and delicious. Two years earlier, in *Antic Hay*, he made humanity look grotesque and satyr-like. In Greek vase-paintings of scenes from Attic comedy, the bodies of men are padded and protruded into grotesque shapes. The impression left by *Antic Hay* is similar, and Huxley gets his suggestion of *grotesquerie* by similar means. At the beginning, Theodore Gumbril, Junior, B. A. Oxon. (a master at a public school), disgusted

with a feeling of impotence and imbecility in his job, throws it up and exploits an invention of his own called Gumbril's Patent Small-Clothes—which are, briefly, trousers with a pneumatic seat, inflated by means of an air-tube with a valve. When Gumbril gets his outraged tailor to make a sample garment it is a great success, except for a bulge. That bulge is thereafter unforgettable. Its satyr-like effect is brutal and deadly. Running like a *motif* in the reader's memory, it intensifies the grotesque and somewhat brutish quality of the characters, who seem to be back in a crude world where goat-like forms cut perpetual gross antics. Not only 'a mad world, my masters' but an ugly world, too. The world of Greek comedy was at least alive; but the world of *Antic Hay* is dead, almost in decay. The 'offensive' passages in this book are offensive only aesthetically; morally they are inoffensive, since their deliberate disgusting ugliness makes a decent clean moral life seem infinitely attractive in comparison. Aldous Huxley can be claimed as a non-decadent and a moral writer, because there is always in the background of his books the implication that a more desirable way of life exists and must be found. Nearly every reader must surely feel, 'If *this* is art and bohemianism, let me have industry and domesticity.'

Toward the end of his life, Thomas Henry Huxley (Aldous's grandfather) wrote that he learned when a boy 'to make things clear and get rid of cant and shows of all sorts'. It is not in the nature of young men of to-day to lead moral or intellectual crusades, yet Aldous Huxley's books certainly strip away from certain aspects of contemporary life the veils of falsity and make-believe and cant.

§ 3.—*Rose Macaulay and Elizabeth*

Wit is the only quality possessed in common by Aldous Huxley, Rose Macaulay, and Elizabeth (Countess Russell,

who writes as 'The Author of *Elizabeth and her German Garden*'). All three are satirists, but for works so different in outlook and response, 'satire' unqualified is an inadequate term. Huxley's satire is savage and tragic. Rose Macaulay's, aloof and heartless. A character in *Vera* (by Elizabeth) says of another woman, 'She knew everything and felt nothing—like God.' Something of that air of divine knowledge and feelinglessness is in the atmosphere of Rose Macaulay's satire. Though she is comic, whereas Aldous Huxley is tragic, she is also acetic where he would be sulphuric; and the vinegar of her comic sense removes her farther from the plane of human sympathy than the vitriol of his tragic concern. Without being intentionally self-righteous she is still a little contemptuously complacent in her attitude toward the fools and the publicans and sinners on this world of folly; toward the whole generation therefore. But a good motto for a satirist would be, 'Assume an illusion, if you have it not.' The whole generation from A to Z may listen with attention to a satirist who attacks A B C, E F G, L M N, and R S T, but if it becomes evident that sooner or later attack will certainly have been made upon A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z, the satirist's barb is dulled. Where all are declared fools there can be no consciousness of folly.

Elizabeth (as all satirists must be) is capable of malice; yet, in her, malice is controlled by emotion rather than by intellect. She writes (in *Love*):

> One would have supposed, [Catherine] said to herself, clenching her hands, that it ought to be possible, after a lifetime of crystal-clear propriety, for a woman to be in a motor-breakdown at night without instantly being suspected of wickedness. Only clergymen, only thoroughly good clergymen, could have such thoughts. . . .

Malice and indignation here come from the writer's heart, and the passage is an example of good satire because it

allows any particular clergyman reader that ultimate loophole of escape which prevents his declaring that the writer is attacking clergymen in the mass. He will observe the rebuke and feel the prick of the barb against his skin, but he will not be finally transfixed because no thoroughly good clergyman could be so immodest as to claim to be a thoroughly good clergyman. Elizabeth is deliciously feline —sharp in claw, but warm and furry. She has, in rare combination, verbal brilliance, a sense of fun, and a faculty for thoughtful and pitying laughter. She is not only a satirist, but also a fully developed novelist; satire is incidental in her novels, not dominant. Her range is less limited than Aldous Huxley's; his people are too often drawn from intellectualist groups, whereas Elizabeth's are not attached to any 'intellectual' clique. Consequently, the objects of her satirical attack are more often mankind's persistent follies and vices than the temporary follies and vices of yesterday and to-day. Thus, her German husbands are *husbands*, not *German* husbands only. And Catherine Monckton's pursuit (in *Love*) of physical beauty and rejuvenation is an aspect of the perpetual tragedy of dying youth as well as a comment upon prevalent follies. Again, the men and women in her books are alive in a sense in which Aldous Huxley's and Rose Macaulay's are not. Huxley's are often (as he obviously intends them to be) moral corpses in an advanced state of putrefaction. Rose Macaulay's are often talking puppets.

But more distinctive than any other quality are Elizabeth's exquisitely wicked feline wit and gorgeous malicious fun. There is the instance of the cook (in *Vera*) who, wishing to communicate her grief to the guests, served a cold clammy meal after the death of a master whom she liked; but who had on a previous occasion, when a woman she detested died, served a lunch including fried soles and devilled bones.

Elizabeth published her first novel in 1898, and as her seventeenth book, *Expiation* (1929), received widespread notice and critical approval, she may already be said to have 'survived', unhampered by the fact that her books have always been approved by the general reader.

§ 4.—*Some American Novelists*

England's awareness of contemporary American literature reaches back little further than 1921, when Sinclair Lewis' *Main Street* appeared in this country. Before the War it was usual for English readers to declare that America had no literature, a quip which had some basis in the tendency of nineteenth-century American writers to cling to European literary traditions. Even after Whitman had prepared an American foundation, the influence of William Dean Howells and Henry James prevailed to restore the European emphasis, and no common trend toward a genuinely American literature can be traced until the present century opened. Even now, and perhaps for a long time to come, to speak of *American* literature can scarcely be an exact use of language, on account of both territorial and racial divergences. While the New England tradition held, the United States might be regarded (in a broad sense) as a cultural unit. Between 1890 and 1930 the officially estimated increase in the United States population was nearly 100 per cent. (total 122,000,000 in 1930), largely accounted for by an enormous influx of foreigners drawn from different races and many different nationalities. Contemporaneously, the Middle West became more articulate than before, and the Pacific-coast region developed rapidly, with some help from the various Hollywood phenomena. Add to this the differences in laws, ideals, and standards of culture from State to State, and it can no longer seem astonishing if an observer outside the country

makes fantastic errors when, in good faith, he attempts to simplify his view of America by the use of broad generalizations. From a heterogeneous mass, 'America' has yet to emerge. Meanwhile, British people need to clear their minds of many misconceptions—chiefly of the illusion that most Americans are slangy, gum-chewing, aggressive, and money-worshipping. It is still not widely known in England that, in character and habit, thousands of Americans are as cultured as large numbers of cultured English people would like to be. Aggressive America (as recent literature has indicated) has as many intelligent critics inside America as outside.

For the present purpose it may be accepted as a convenient half-truth that there are several Americas (the Eastern States, the South, the Middle West, the Pacific Coast) and several American literatures. An able American critic, H. S. Canby, suggests[1] that the only common denominator in the various present-day Americas is *energy*, and those British people who have a reasoned admiration of the imaginative literature now coming out of America, value that quality of energy above all else. Energy is the contribution America has to make toward the reinvigoration of European-type civilization. Though in England it has become almost a habit to protest against the impending tragedy of an Americanized Europe, our lively sense of the imperative need to preserve the integrity of our own culture ought not to make us unaware that for America to become Europeanized would be a worse tragedy for civilization.

And a still greater (and more likely) tragedy will be enacted if America should dissipate her energy by canalizing it in the service of mass production, which leads to mental standardization as well as to the standardization of processes. The danger of domination by a vast mass-mind

[1] *American Estimates.*

and a vast mass-soul is America's greatest danger to-day. Controlled by Authority of one kind or another, Europe has had a mass-soul for centuries past. The post-War generation, with its passionate but sturdy individualism, is crusading against the mass-soul. Of such crusaders Bernard Shaw has been the prophet, within cerebral limits; D. H. Lawrence is their freelance standard-bearer, with his declaration that morality must be passionate, not merely implicit, and that it must change the blood rather than the mind.[1] Through Whitman of mid-nineteenth-century America and Lawrence of early twentieth-century England a completed circuit of energy links the two countries.

Sinclair Lewis' preoccupation with The Shewing-up of George F. Babbitt is chiefly an American domestic affair, which we have enjoyed hugely but which concerns us no more than any other family squabble. If Sinclair Lewis had had a less remarkable endowment of literary genius than he has, the squabble might have seemed almost indecent, as any private row will when it is overheard. The triumphant fact about Babbitt is that when he is not being merely George F. Babbitt he is our old friend Everyman. And in the twentieth century this does not mean (thank heaven) that Babbitt is continually encountering mental, moral, and spiritual crises, but that he is the universal infant-baffled when facing such problems as that 'oft-pondered, never solved, of what to do with the old safety-razor blade'; that he is the universal infant-enraged when he finds only wet towels in the bathroom; that he shows the universal male infant-innocence when he asks his wife,

'. . . Seen the morning paper yet?' 'No, dear.' In twenty-three years of married life, Mrs. Babbitt had seen the paper before her husband just sixty-seven times.

[1] See D. H. Lawrence's *Studies in Classic American Literature* (chapter on Whitman).

—that he is the universal child-with-toy, when, having bought an electric cigar-lighter as a new 'dingus' for his 'auto', he has a sense of being laden with treasure and engaged in romantic adventure.

Sinclair Lewis' significance for America as a satirist lies in his unequalled skill in the game of debunking his countrymen: deflating their absurd faith in '100 per cent efficiency', in the might of advertisement (whether for cornflakes or Sunday schools), in Rotary, in social etiquette, in the thousand illusions wherewith the American business man deludes himself in pursuit of his illusion-in-chief—material success. When he has caught up with the illusion, he has (as Sinclair Lewis sees him in *Dodsworth*) lost a vital part of himself:

'By God, I'll enjoy life if it kills me—and it probably will!' he grumbled. 'You've got to give me time. I've started this business of being "free" about thirty-five years too late. I'm a good citizen. I've learned that Life is real and Life is earnest and the presidency of a corporation is its goal. What would I be doing with anything so degenerate as enjoying myself?' [1]

Seen from the English standpoint, post-War America's peril was her deadly earnestness and humourless immersion in the business of 'getting-on'. If Sinclair Lewis taught the American middle-west nothing else than to laugh at itself, he would deserve to be regarded as a national benefactor. As a novelist he is completely equipped, but his greatest gift is a unique ability for writing swift and vigorous narrative with an irresistible sweep. His soundest and most solid novel, *Martin Arrowsmith*, receives less than its proper measure of attention, just because of its traditional solidity. *Main Street* has less verve and humour than *Babbitt*. Its picture of Gopher Prairie, Minnesota, as the peak of modern civilization is as cruel as naked truth and

[1] *Dodsworth*, Ch. IV.

less effective than *Babbitt* because it is more cruel. The satirical exaggeration in *Elmer Gantry* is unfortunate because it provides a sniping-post for those who would pretend that his picture of religious charlatanism in present-day America is not true. Both this and *The Man Who Knew Coolidge* are brilliant books, written with the full force of the author's remarkable narrative velocity, which lessened its pace considerably in *Dodsworth*. Summarizing, *Martin Arrowsmith* is Sinclair Lewis' best novel *qua* novel; *Babbitt* and *Main Street* the most potent of his social purgatives; and *Elmer Gantry* his most *serious* book, since (though it is in part overstated) it is a courageous attempt to deal with a horrible cancer in the religious life of America, where the Fundamentalist Inquisition has improved upon the methods of Torquemada by substituting certain types of 'moral persuasion'.

Theodore Dreiser has performed the unparalleled feat of writing a great novel, when, according to nearly all the canons of literary criticism, it should be an entire failure. *An American Tragedy* is a great novel. That positive statement had better be left unhampered by comparisons, however strong the impulse to suggest that it is the greatest novel so far produced in America. And yet its thick muddy style and gross untidiness are maddening. There are over 800 pages. A more skilful craftsman might find no difficulty in reducing them to 500. And in doing so he would certainly destroy the book. On principle, an untidy book must be frowned upon. But this untidiness in *An American Tragedy* is somehow the untidiness of the life it represents. A man who wanted to create a field with trees and grass and bushes and hedges, could make a much tidier field than any made by nature; though who would prefer it to a natural field? If a code of rules could be drawn up for the creation of fields, nature's pattern would certainly be modified. The rules of art are based upon the limitations

of art and the material of art and of the artist—limitations which make for simplification. But if an artist appears who can secure an equally good or a better illusion of life by other means, he will do so. *An American Tragedy*, we may sigh, is all wrong. It is. But it happens to be the one book among Theodore Dreiser's where his 'all wrongness' has led to an overwhelming rightness.

Elsewhere, Dreiser's methods as a cumulative realist—his piled immensity, tedious repetition, his characters struggling against but shackled by conventional morality—fail, by much or little. His books are boundlessly passive. Though there is tremendous energy, they heave with the energy, they do not flame with it. In *Sister Carrie*, *Jennie Gerhardt*, *The Financier*, *The Titan*, *The Genius*, there is a dull, heavy muteness and scarcely anything of joy: great slabs of life. The seduction theme enters into most of Dreiser's books, but it is never for a moment glamorous. He is a writer of moral documents in which the morality is always negative, for it rises from the revelation of the disadvantages (or worse) of wrongdoing, not from a vision of the desirability of rightdoing. *An American Tragedy* apart, Dreiser's novels would appear negligible if it were not that at times they sound the note of authentic genius—that quality of *power*, more difficult to analyse than to recognize. To begin *Jennie Gerhardt* (with its description of the mother and daughter in search of menial work at a hotel) is to have the immediate sensation of contact with genius, such as the first words of a Hardy novel give. Hardy sustains that sensation from page to page; Dreiser usually does not. On an early page of *Jennie Gerhardt* the sensation is lost amid a minutely and unnecessarily detailed catalogue of Jennie's father's misfortunes; when that paragraph has been read the note of authority is gone, only to be recovered spasmodically in later pages. In *An American Tragedy*, the note of authority, the sense of power, the assurance of genius are attained

frequently enough to preserve the full momentum of the narrative through the flat stretches. This story of the son of a mission preacher, who secures moderate success in business, kills a girl half by accident and half wilfully to free himself from a love tangle, and goes to the electric chair, is as terrifyingly moral as any book ever written. Looking back over his recollections of the story a reader can see how from the moment of Clyde Griffiths' first slight turn from the path of rectitude, the young man was doomed. All through the book we seem to hear the muffled footbeats of an implacable destiny.

Ernest Hemingway is more in step with the despair of the nineteen-twenties than either Lewis or Dreiser. His first book, *In Our Time*, is a gathering of short stories interspersed with cameos of horror—War episodes, a ghastly execution-scene, bull-fighting impressions, and others. *Fiesta* [1] is a novel concerned with expatriated Americans in France and elsewhere. Both these volumes, and much of *Men Without Women*, are nakedly and pitilessly hopeless. *A Farewell to Arms* describes (it is a novel) an American's experiences of war and love as a Red Cross officer with the Italian army on the Alpine front. In whatever Hemingway has written, the characters are emotion-registering creatures rather than emotion-feeling. It is as though they were transparent men and women capable of watching and calculating the precise effect made upon themselves by every single experience, and more intensely concerned with the spectacle than with the experience. To say, what might seem superficially to be true, that they experience no sensation, no emotional response, would be a ludicrously inaccurate interpretation. The truth is that their responses are terribly acute, but that they come to the experience of their emotions as though they had no pre-knowledge of the traditional responses of other people. A woman (or a man)

[1] Called *The Sun Also Rises* in America.

in love does not ordinarily make any attempt to experience the passion as though she had never previously heard, read, thought or spoken of love. Her response to love may be in part her own, but it will also be in part an imitative response reproducing facets of other responses—her friends', Juliet's, Cleopatra's—of those of all the women she has ever met in books or plays. Catherine Barkley (in *A Farewell to Arms*) must seem immodest or worse, to some readers, because she does not hedge her approach to love with those barriers of gradualness, propriety, or whatnot, that are a part of inherited tradition or developed prudence. The hardness or casualness that seems to characterize the emotional contacts in Hemingway's books is, rather, this attempt to bring naked personalities into relation with naked experiences—the garments removed constitute the clothing of traditional approach and traditional response. The effect is to produce an exquisitely acute perception—of pleasure, passion, or pain, according to the nature of the emotional situation.

CHAPTER VI

THE REFUGE OF FORM AND FANTASY

WHEN the first Earl of Oxford and Asquith read David Garnett's *Lady into Fox*, it is reported, he shook his head and announced firmly that a woman could not turn into a fox. His attitude is a usual one, and understandable; nor does it necessarily argue a lack of imagination, for imagination and fantasy have no common basis. Imagination may work with full energy on the actual material which the world provides; but in pure fantasy the world is rejected and a different state of being adopted. Any critical approach to fantasy in literature must involve examining the causes behind that rejection of the normal world upon which fantasy is conditional. And throughout the whole range of fantasy, from the fairy-tale to Barrie's latest plays, the various causes can be simplified into a single cause—that 'the world is too much with us'. A deep-seated *malaise* underlies all make-believe. Fairy-tales, enjoyed by children, are written by grown-ups; and nothing is more common than to find modern sick-souled adults flying for relief to the fairy-tale form, as (for example) Wilde and Strindberg did. There is little sound evidence that children could not be as well satisfied by realistic stories [1] as by the fantastic sort; though, if there were, fairy-tale time is bedtime, when the child's impression of the real world has reached its depth and compensatory fantasy is suitable.

[1] 'Children love to hear stories about other children when they were young,' said Lamb, and then (as an adult would) went on to write *Dream Children*, a fantasy.

Even without the terrific impulse given by the War and its consequences, it is likely that interest in realistic literature would have waned after the intensive concentration on realism (or naturalism) between (roughly) 1890 and 1914. To whatever extent a spirit of protest may have lain at the back of Gissing's or (the early) George Moore's realism, of Arnold Bennett's or the Manchester dramatists' naturalism, the dominant mood was the mood of acceptance. 'Life is like that; let us accept it so, and see what (for better or worse) can be made to come of it.' Such literature may display pity because of man's sufferings, or admiration because of his endurance; having faith that WHAT IS may be made into WHAT SHOULD BE, it clings to reality and does not totally reject. In the confusion of the War-period literary tendencies went into the furnace. After the War, English twentieth-century naturalism had its swan-song in Arnold Bennett's *Riceyman Steps*.[1]

Adult Englishmen and Englishwomen find no difficulty in accepting fantasy so long as it obeys either one of two conditions: (*a*) that it shall be in poetry; or (*b*) that if in prose, it shall be addressed to children. They are willing to accept fantasy so long as it is 'in costume' as verse; or, alternatively, they are willing to become as little children. In both instances they readily lay aside their frigid critical faculties, and make what concessions are required of them—whether in *The Ancient Mariner*[2] or in *Peter Pan*. Yet they are still 'difficult' (as they say of fractious children) about prose-fantasies written for themselves, and are much less ready to play the game of *supposing* in connexion with such grown-up fairy-tales as *Lady into Fox* or Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Lolly Willowes*. Perhaps the fault is chiefly

[1] The realism of the later experimenters (see *ante*, pp. 52 ff) is an endeavour after realism in form rather than in matter.

[2] Though one still hears of readers rejecting Coleridge's poem because 'it can't be true'.

the authors'. Walter de la Mare, David Garnett, Sylvia Warner, T. F. Powys, belonging to a faithless age, have attempted to rationalize the fairy-tale, to catch and cage the butterfly, Make-Believe, instead of leaping incontinently to the butterfly's back. Or, to change the figure, they have taken the naked winged fairy and dressed him up in a morning-suit with spats before letting him loose among twentieth-century people.

Sylvia Townsend Warner has said : [1]

> The nature of the events which he describes obliges the fantasist to adopt a sober and ungarnished method of narration. . . . Since his main thesis surprises by itself, he must deny himself further surprises. . . . The novelist not only *may* niggle away with small licences all the time, he is a dull dog if he *doesn't*. But the fantasist, having taken his initial liberty, must mind his Ps and Qs for the rest of his adventure. . . . The fantasist who has begun by asking for one vast initial credit must do on that credit to the end.

This seems equivalent to arguing that a financier who has persuaded £5,000,000 from the public, must always travel third-class lest his creditors suspect him of extravagance. In practice, the only means by which the gentlemen engaged in high finance can maintain public confidence is by living as though they can pick up £5,000,000 any day—as, in fact, they usually can. The fantasist's position is analogous. If, with his vast initial credit, he becomes timid about sixpences, the reader may come to the point of worrying about his own ready advancement of that vast credit. The reader who at first has made no demur when Mrs. Tebrick turns into a vixen, comes at last to head-shaking denial because the author has saved sixpences instead of doubling the vast initial credit.

There is no middle course for the fantasist. He must either demand unlimited credit, or he must pay his way

[1] In a lecture at the City Literary Institute, October 21st, 1929.

every moment as he goes along. His improbabilities must be so continuously improbable that comparison with the world of fact will be merely absurd, and therefore not attempted. Or he must *completely* rationalize his marvels, as H. G. Wells did in his earlier books.

Lady into Fox may rouse Asquithian head-shakings in any one of us because it is semi-rationalized, and the telling so matter-of-fact. While the pro-fox party is saying (with perfect rightness), 'Beautifully written; brilliantly narrated', the anti-fox party is saying, 'Yes . . . but what about the clothes?'

'Clothes?——'

'Yes, clothes! We are willing to concede (temporarily, and without prejudice), when the author writes, "Where Mr. Tebrick's wife had been the moment before was a small fox, of a very bright red", that it may have happened sudden-like, and just in that way. But when, afterwards, the fox (the late Mrs. Tebrick) overcome by modesty drags out her dressing-gown and struggles into it, we are reminded of the clothes Mrs. Tebrick was wearing at the moment she turned into a fox. What became of those?'

'Oh, but surely . . . If a woman can turn into a fox, there's no difficulty about her clothes.'

'Yes, but there is. Human flesh might suddenly turn into anything; and those clothes *might* suddenly have turned into the fox's fur, or they might have fallen emptily to the ground. But Mr. Garnett ought to have made up his mind about them. Later, the story is partly rationalized —the dressing-gown business; the fox-woman's pleasure when Mr. Tebrick realizes that she wants to look at their collection of stereoscopic views; the increasing invasion of her woman-nature by the fox-nature; and so on. If this is a miracle let us have a wild fantastic miracle, with disappearing clothes and everything. But if it is a kink in Being—Nature having a sudden fit of absentmindedness—

or something like that, Mr. Garnett ought to have done something about those clothes.'

'Well, I don't see . . .'

'No, but Mr. Wells would have seen. Just as he saw that when his Invisible Man fed, the food would remain visible until it was assimilated.'

In the end, the objector, absurdly disgruntled about those clothes, may withdraw his willingness to make the initial concession or grant the vast initial credit. If human credulity is to be exploited at all for the purposes of fantasy there need be no limit to the degree of credulity.

David Garnett's *A Man in the Zoo* arouses none of these questionings and doubts because it is a completely rationalized fantasy, and worked out with unwavering logicality. Any girl quarrelling with her lover might say, 'You ought to be shut up in the Zoo.' A recent Underground poster has shown pictorially the idea with which so many people have toyed—of transposing the positions of the animals and the humans at the Zoo. And ruthless logic suggests that if a satisfactory specimen of *homo sapiens* offered himself, the R.Z.S. could find more reasons for accepting than for rejecting. But nice people will say, of Mrs. Tebrick the fox and of John Cromartie in the Zoo, 'What a degrading idea: man as an ape and woman as a vixen! How very different from the noble ideas we used to get in books.'

Fantasy, being always a means of escape from the pressure of WHAT IS, cannot ever in this sense be rooted in a noble idea. The operating mood in Josephine Lackett and John Cromartie was disgust with WHAT IS. And though the desire for escape from WHAT IS may turn the mind either to noble (say, religious) ends or to ends other than noble, the fundamental desire always originates in despair or disgust concerning the immediate present. The revival of fantasy in the nineteen-twenties gave expression to the prevalent

despair, just as hymns full of home-sickness for heaven (or negro spirituals) served a similar function in earlier times. Man in despair about himself and his age may, according to his nature, find a refuge in religion, in drink, in dancing, in philosophy, in fantasy.

Conveniently, we can point to the War as the cause whence springs the insistent *malaise* of this generation, but the whole truth may not lie there. In Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Lolly Willowes*, Laura feels that

> Her disquiet had no relevance to her life. It arose out of the ground with the smell of the dead leaves: it followed her through the darkening streets; it confronted her in the look of the risen moon. 'Now! Now!' it said to her: and no more. The moon seemed to have torn the leaves from the trees that it might stare at her more imperiously. Sometimes she tried to account for her uneasiness by saying that she was growing old, and that the year's death reminded her of her own. She compared herself to the ripening acorn that feels through windless autumnal days and nights the increasing pull of the earth below.

Lolly Willowes is not an allegory, though with a little ingenuity in interpretation it might be made to appear as one. It is a lovely tale, so exquisitely told as to make us reluctant to think particularly of the theme—the changing of Laura into a witch. Such unobtrusive skill and art have gone into the gradual preparation for the change that the passage from the one state to the other is as smooth as slipping from waking into sleep. Sylvia Warner calls for no vast initial credit, nor does she niggle with sixpences. As every unusually able writer can, she takes what she requires as she requires it, without any consciousness in the reader that she has required anything at all. If a graceless word may be used of so gracious a book, the witch-experiences of Lolly are so completely rationalized that the story can be read through in terms either of this world or the other-world: these may be happenings in the actual world

or faint phantasms in Laura's mind. Never before has it been possible to accept black magic, the witches' sabbath, and the devil so quietly as here. And if, to some minds, the paraphernalia of deviltry are a bore and a weariness to the spirit, *Lolly Willowes* remains none the less a lovely prose story. *Mr. Fortune's Maggot*, by the same author, proceeds less well than it begins, and *The True Heart* has one gorgeous half-hour when Sukey Bond visits Queen Victoria. But none of Sylvia Townsend Warner's books yields its best on first acquaintance, and equal familiarity with the later books might bring them into line with *Lolly Willowes*, which is better at each re-reading.

T. F. Powys insists so much upon the lustfulness of the Dorset village people in his stories that he must be regarded as a puritan moralist of a kind that is fast disappearing from England. Sin is no doubt everywhere and the puritan of this type can therefore be sure of finding sin wherever he looks for it, and he is usually looking. This would not necessarily result in any further blemish in Powys' books than a certain tedium, if it were not that it is curiously combined with a suggestion of sniggering naughtiness, as though together with hatred of sin were combined a perverse slight satisfaction that the sin is there to brood over. Pieces of torn lace, unfastened buttons and the like are dwelt upon as symbols of fleshly allurement, until this mannerism becomes a hall-mark on Powys' works. His stories have been enthusiastically praised by the critics, but only in regard to one book does the enthusiasm seem to be completely justified. *Mr. Weston's Good Wine* can hardly be overpraised. Though here, too, there are obscene people and obscene doings, the obscenity serves to increase the uncommon power of the allegory presented in the story. Mr. Weston and his good wine connote God and the attributes of God. With Michael, his assistant, Mr. Weston came to the village of Folly Down in a Ford car;

'he climbed a tumulus in the gathering darkness, and regarded all the earth with a lonely pity'.

> . . . He created the summer anew as he looked down the valley. The hedges were white with sloe blossom, and the willow bushes were in flower; a few butterflies were abroad and the bumble bees. The blackthorn blossoms were shed; the new green of the hedges came, and the sweet scent of may blossom. The may faded, but in the meadows the deeper colour of the buttercups—those June brides—took the place of the maiden cowslips until the hay-mowers came, and then the white and red roses bloomed in the hedges. Midsummer, that time of rich sunshine, was soon gone; the meadows were yellow again with hawkweed, while in the rougher fields the ragwort grew in clumps, upon which the peacock butterflies fed until near drunken with honey.[1]

This is an allegory in which the moral never exercises a dehumanizing influence. Mr. Weston moves in opposition to the ugly lives, which are here significant of evil forces and do not seem, as in other books by T. F. Powys, to be only rustic ragtag. There is brilliant inventive ingenuity and beauty of description; Alice Grobe, the rector's wife, has the characteristic Powysian naughty wantonness, but she is nevertheless delightful; and the love fable of Michael and Tamar is beautifully done. This book, alone, should give T. F. Powys an assured place in recent literature.

David Garnett and Sylvia Warner show in their novels a developed sense of form almost as distinctive as the element of fantasy. In America, among novelists of the middle generation, creative energy and fecundity were so powerful that form in the novel received no more attention than in Victorian England. But, more recently, younger American writers have been seeking to impose upon intractable reality a high finish and sense of completed form, in the endeavour to make the novel a conscious work of art. By its nature and method of composition the novel is commonly an

[1] Ch. VI.

accumulation rather than a creation; its very largeness makes deliberate shape almost impossible and pattern difficult—in the sense in which a statue has shape, a painting pattern, and a sonnet both shape and pattern.

Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* is among the very few novels in English which have symmetry in form and a completed pattern. The breaking of the bridge; the precipitation of five people into the abyss; Brother Juniper's investigations into the victims' lives in the hope of detecting the finger of God in the catastrophe; and the final rounding-off—about this theme Wilder has *constructed* his story. Every part of the construction contributes to the final shape, and it is possible to get from *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* just such aesthetic pleasure as a finely shaped piece of pottery or a statuette can give. The future for the novel in this direction is likely to be limited, for it is hard to see how definite shape can be imposed upon a full-length novel, or in fact upon any novel which does not begin with some more or less symmetrical grouping of characters. This in its turn would tend to lead the novel into a bloodless academic mode, such as Thornton Wilder has already affected in *The Woman of Andros*. Though that later book is as beautifully written as *The Bridge* (in places more beautifully), excessive preoccupation with form and fine writing has made it both rigid and frigid. *The Bridge* is certainly a triumph, since by contrivance or by happy chance symmetry is combined with human interest.

Willa Cather's novels (particularly *Death Comes for the Archbishop*) have pattern and design rather than completed shape. Their form is akin to form as it might be found in a tapestry pattern, where attention may be riveted by a particular figure as much as by the whole design. Elinor Wylie's *The Venetian Glass Nephew* provides a threefold pleasure: the completed design, the incidental figures

forming it, and the line and colour in the detail of composition. She unites fantasy and form with an exceptional delicacy, and almost every page has some exquisite verbal lacework over which the reader may linger with delight.

CHAPTER VII

THE UNHAPPY WARRIORS

§ 1.—*The Two Voices*

ALLOWING a hundred years for the outlines to clear, the historian who attempts in A.D. 2020 to write a dispassionate account of the World War 1914–1918, will have as his chief sources these :

(*i*) Official histories ;
(*ii*) Generals' and admirals' official dispatches ;
(*iii*) Memoirs, etc., by officers and statesmen ;
(*iv*) Letters, diaries, etc., by the rank-and-file ;
(*v*) Soldier songs ;
(*vi*) Wartime newspapers ;
(*vii*) War novels ;
(*viii*) Controversial writings (newspaper articles, correspondence, pamphlets, etc.) relating to (*vii*).

Given incredible industry and a developed sense of evidence, the future historian may be able to get closer to ' the truth about the War ' than now appears possible. We are prevented from knowing that truth because none of us is dispassionate about the War. If we do not happen to favour any one particular lie, we are nevertheless partisan in certain respects, as we cannot and should not avoid being in face of a catastrophe so overwhelming. Passionate pacifism may not prevent another war, but impartiality certainly will not. Liddell Hart's *The Real War* is as near a balanced survey as we are likely to get in this generation, but necessarily,

where so much is still unsure, the author's opinions and convictions will need to be checked, and may have to undergo correction. He is more impressed by some generals than by others; he believes the attrition theory was tragically mistaken; he blames the high command for failing to realize the full value of tanks for ending the deadlock in the west. The fact that most students are at present either pro- or anti- upon all these and many other points, must lead to suspension of judgment until the pro- and the anti- parties are both dead.

Let it be supposed that the historian in 2020 will be interested in the War World in two aspects mainly: (*a*) the military, and (*b*) the human. Statistical analysis and the study of maps and troop-movements will at length ensure some final verdict on military matters. But the human aspect will raise greater difficulties. Here the historian will find himself listening to two voices, each denying the other. Sometimes, however, he will hear a chorus of strident voices shouting, 'Abominable lie!' in reply to charges which had not been made at all, and had no existence except in the imagination of the shouters.

The 'human aspect' embraces the personal experiences of soldiers, auxiliaries, and civilians: what *happened* to them individually, what they felt, thought, and said; their behaviour, sensations, desires, and *morale*. The most voluminous source of information on such matters is provided in the diaries, reminiscences, and novels written by junior officers, non-commissioned officers, and privates. The novels, of course, are valuable only when they have their basis in actual experience, and not in invention. A minimum of ability in literary judgment and in assessing the value of evidence, will enable a practised reader to distinguish between recollection and invention in War-novels. He will be at once aware (from internal evidence) of the difference between (for example) the sincerity and

truth of *Her Privates We* and the sex-inflamed silliness of *WAAC*.

The two voices which spoke in and round about the War-novels and related books, came on the one hand from those who see war realistically, and on the other hand from those who see it romantically. Emphasis is laid upon its daily ugliness by the realists; upon its stimulus to heroism by the romantics. Both impressions are valid; and both were to be found among the soldiers themselves, without reference to their degree of personal bravery. There is no difference in respect of physical courage between a Julian Grenfell and a Siegfried Sassoon; yet the former's *Into Battle* is a splendidly heroic poem, while Siegfried Sassoon's *Counter-Attack* deliberately stresses the blood and mud and murder and suicide and putrefaction, which are among the daily experiences of war. Between these two impressions of war there is no vital contradiction, so far as the fighting men were themselves concerned. Irreconcilable antagonism between the two voices only begins when civilians and certain senior officers begin to vociferate in the newspapers and at public gatherings.

Nothing need be said here about the professional senior officers' impressions of war. Their war is not the same war as that fought by the junior officers and 'other ranks'. This is not a comment upon courage or ability, but simply a recognition that the senior officer's job is as different from the fighting soldier's job, as a mining-company director's is from that of a miner working at the coal-face. And it is as absurd for a senior officer to pretend to know (or to be expected to know) what it feels like to be a private soldier on active service, as it is for a wealthy woman living in a West End luxury flat to pretend to know what it feels like to be a charwoman at sixpence an hour.

The aggressive civilians' view of war is more important, since it counts for so much in the formation of public opinion

about war. British aggressive civilians (male and female) are not content to know that British soldiers have won a war; they want to believe that it has been won by an army of gentlemen in a gentlemanly way. Only when war is wrapped in a haze of romantic illusion has the British public sufficient moral courage to contemplate war. ('British public' here can be read, with varying degrees of applicability, as German, American, French, Italian, or any other national public.) The soldiers, too, must be romanticized and sentimentalized. Bill Walker in May 1914 was a 'street-corner hooligan'; Bill Walker in December 1914 was a 'beloved Tommy'; Bill Walker in May 1919 was a 'loafer on the dole'. If in May 1929 a fellow-soldier wrote a novel in which Bill Walker appears as a liar, a thief, a boozer, a foul-mouthed adulterer, and yet also a brave fighter who never got 'cold feet', the novelist would be accused of libelling the British soldier. The aggressive civilian insists that if Bill Walker was a brave fighting man, he was a hero, a soldier, and a gentleman; and that it is a monstrous and an abominable lie to say that he was a liar, a thief, a boozer, or foul-mouthed, or an adulterer. Yet the men who were with Bill Walker know that he was all these, and at the same time the best of the lot of them when it came to a real fight. That is to say, Bill Walker in the army was the same as Bill Walker out of the army, with such intensification or modification of his natural tendencies as the circumstances allowed or compelled. He lied and swore filthily most of the time; he thieved and boozed when he could, which was seldom; he committed adultery when a brothel was available and he had money to pay the fee. Bill Walker was enlisted to fight and help to win the War; and when he was given opportunity he fulfilled his contract. He was not told when he enlisted that he must not lie, thieve, booze, or swear, or that he must keep sexually pure. He probably was given lectures on V. D., and he knew that to contract

infection of this kind was in practice a military crime—even if King's Regulations did not specify the fact. But when he came near the red lamp so thoughtfully tolerated by the authorities, he 'chanced his arm'.[1]

The British army was not composed wholly or mainly of Bill Walkers; nor has any War-novelist suggested that it was. It was possible for a man to retain in the army throughout the War whatever admirable personal qualities he might have possessed when he enlisted. Many did so. One frequent tragedy, however, was that immature youngsters often did not get the chance of developing such restraints and qualities of character as they might have developed if they had gone from school to business instead of into the army. Robert Graves writes, of Welsh boys of the professional classes going out to France as young officers: 'They were strictly brought up,' but 'there were no restraints in France as in England; these boys had money to spend and knew that they had a good chance of being killed within a few weeks anyhow. They did not want to die

[1] Lest this hypothetical instance should be thought to distort truth, I will cite a case within my personal knowledge. One of my companions on an Eastern front in the War would lie and thieve on any official occasion when the circumstances demanded it—as we all would; he boozed whenever he got the chance—about half of us were teetotallers; his speech was almost continuously obscene—some of us managed on two or three swear words; on rare occasions he had sexual relations with black women—I knew, at first hand, no other instance of this particular vice. We all knew of his vices and we thought him a fool on account of one or two of them; but we had a strong and deep affection for him, we trusted him absolutely, we would have chosen him first of all to have with us in a tight corner, and we knew he would never 'let us down'. I have not seen him since the War ended, but my regard for him is as real to-day as it was twelve years ago, and I would go miles to meet him. The only reason for mentioning him here is to affirm a conviction (shared by multitudes) that there is no necessary relation between civilian virtues and military ones, and that it is either childish folly or cant to talk of 'maligning the British army' whenever drink and debauchery are mentioned. War is not a cure for debauchery, nor a preventive.—A. C. W.

virginal.'[1] Such facts hurt the public conscience so badly that attempts are made to salve the hurt by declaring that the facts are not as stated; or that the publication of those facts is a libel on the British army, whereas it is, actually, no more than the record of what happened to certain individual men.

But the point thousands of ex-soldiers would like to put to aggressive civilians of the romantico-sentimental type is this: 'Among the millions who went into the army to fight the War, for themselves and for you, the great majority remained what they were before—average decent men. But suppose we had all become immoral drunkards (as we might well have done under the conditions) what right would you have had to complain of the price we paid for winning the War? And which (if you had thought to ask yourselves) would you have preferred: that we should save our own souls and lose the War, or win the War and damn our souls (as we probably did, anyhow, if murder is a mortal sin)?' All but a negligible minority in the armies despised 'the "beloved Tommy" stuff', as they despised 'the Little Mother'[2] type of propaganda, and as they despise those who elected to defend them against the War-novel 'libels' during the controversy of 1929–1930.

That controversy might profitably be ignored if it had been no more than a conflict between two sectional points of view in relation to a war that was past and done. It was more than that, however, and was important as involving an opposition of principles. The opposition (in its important phases) was between (I) pacifism and militarism; (II) the individual view and the collective view; (III) the horror school and the comradeship school.

(I) Many pacifists (though by no means all) believe that the prevention of future wars depends to some extent upon

[1] *Goodbye to All That*, Ch. XXI, pp. 294–5 (1929 edn.)
[2] Ibid., Ch. XXI, pp. 283 ff.

causing all and sundry to realize how terrible is war; and that therefore it is a duty not to gloze over any of its brutality, horror, murder, pain, blood, mud, weariness, tedium, and general destruction and wastage. Militarists deplore all such insistence upon the physical terrors of war, and desire to exalt the heroic qualities which are called out, the honour of sacrifice, and the glory of death or victory. Militarists support war (*a*) because it is the profession of their caste; or (*b*) because man-hunting and man-killing provide them with the ultimate ecstasy that their peculiarly constituted natures demand; or (*c*) because they are genuinely convinced that war is inevitable as man's nature is at present constituted, and that the preservation and cultivation of combative instincts is a necessary national safeguard against enemy attack.

(II) Douglas Jerrold's pamphlet, *The Lie about the War*,[1] expresses the collective view in opposition to the individual view, and is the most substantial statement of the case against War-books which aim to present the 'actualities of war'. But Douglas Jerrold's case is not strengthened by the fact, obvious on every page, that he dislikes and does not understand the particular personal outlook of the War-books with which he deals; and he is not, as he seems to think, demolishing *their* case, but is stating his own entirely different one. He will not have it that the writers he has under notice [2] really deal with the 'actualities of war', because they refer to particular experiences and not to general truths: 'writing of the War always and continuously from the standpoint of the individual, without pointing out, or even allowing the reader to guess, that the individual in modern national warfare is not a fighting unit'.[3]

[1] Criterion Miscellany, No. 9, 1930.

[2] Hemingway, Aldington, Graves, Montague, Herbert, Mottram, etc.

[3] P. 22.

Every one of these books . . . deals with every conceivable kind of struggle except of one army against another, of one people against another. . . .[1]

The whole of these books deal with specifically ordinary people. They do not show the poet, the artist, the statesman or the man of religion sacrificed, yet this is the only legitimate individual tragedy of war. . . .[2]

When he speaks of results of the War, Douglas Jerrold considers its effects upon States, not upon persons. His view all through, therefore, is that of the objective historian thinking in terms of armies and nations. But for ninety per cent of those engaged, the War was a personal concern; and the peace was a personal concern. Men in the trenches thought in terms of themselves and their companions; in terms of lice, and cold, and N.C.O.'s ('decent' or oppressive); in terms of their families and when they themselves would get home; not in terms of 'the State' and 'the welfare of the world'. They knew (or for a long time they hoped) that there was a purpose behind it all, and toward that purpose they did their 'bit'; but they viewed the War in relation to themselves, not themselves in relation to the War. Why should not the egocentric impression of war have its literature? And what intelligent reader of these War-books has imagined himself to be reading other than personal impressions? The theory that man exists for the State and not the State for man is fundamentally evil, however general it may be. The State is a creation of the common will; and its proper function is to ensure the welfare and comfort collectively and individually of the persons whose creature it is. It is the acceptance of the State and of armies as vast million-handed machines needing to take no account of the 'specifically ordinary' individual person, that leads to the wars Douglas Jerrold wishes to

[1] P. 17. [2] P. 43.

avert. Teach the voter to think 'This is *my* affair' and the individual soldier 'This is *my* war', and nations by becoming less supine and less susceptible to mass-suggestion will be less easily stampeded into war. Protesting against the suggestion in the War-books that the War was futile, Douglas Jerrold writes:

> Why this damnably foolish cant about a futile war, a war which broke up the structure of Europe, hurled three empires into the dust, brought into the very forefront of history three great new states, liberated the German people from a military despotism, established a new system of international relationships and by a curious inversion, carried Western conceptions to Eastern nations? [1]

Apart from the fact that ten years is too short a time in which to assess the value of the changes referred to, the only possible test of the futility or otherwise of the War is to inquire whether the War has increased the sum of human happiness, or if it seems likely to. Can we say to each bereaved woman, to each wounded soldier, to each workless ex-soldier, 'Because of your loss, the world is to-day (or will be to-morrow) a happier place'? If we cannot, then the majority will continue to think of the War as futile. The agony of one man at war may be as great as the agony of a world at war. A million in suffering is not a million-fold multiplication of the unit of suffering.

And as to the purpose of the War-books, another view than Douglas Jerrold's is possible. He says, 'If the day came when the fear of suffering and nothing else turned nations from their chosen path, Western civilization would give place to a nobler one.' [2] His observation must have been limited if it has led him to conclude that either in intention or result the sixteen books he names inculcate 'the fear of suffering and nothing else'. On the contrary,

[1] P. 24. [2] P. 48.

they must have inspired or strengthened in thousands the very conviction commended by Douglas Jerrold—that

> No races of men which hold the Christian faith and are born of women will ever grow up in the belief that principles which they have come to hold for conscience sake are to be abandoned for safety's sake.[1]

It is possible to hold and stand by that conviction while at the same time believing that the 1914–1918 War will appear in the judgment of history as a futile waste of life and wealth.

(III) The opposition between the 'horror school' and the 'comradeship school' in the War-book controversy turns upon the definition of war (quoted by Douglas Jerrold [2]) as 'months of acute boredom interspersed by days of acute danger'. To this, the comradeship school would add 'and relieved by experiences of almost constant deep comradeship'. There is hardly a soldier who would not approve that addition, just as there is hardly a War-book which does not justify it. The foreshortening of the War-books—that is, the bringing into close apposition of moments of intense horror, without the sense of spacing-out that was given in actual experience—is another charge brought against them. But there is an art of reading as well as an art of writing, and it should be possible for a reader to provide his own time-spacing mentally in a narrative of events. If 'three asterisks' or some such sentence as 'We went back to the front line a month later' do not give the sense of time elapsing, the fault is not wholly the author's. All narrative is a system of compression—and an unsatisfactory one—since the space and time occupied by an account of the intense crowded moments is more extensive than that devoted to the unexciting days, months, or years. Unless readers can be counted upon (as most can be) to

[1] P. 48. [2] P. 21.

realize this, written narration will become impossible.[1] Those who plead that greater emphasis should be laid upon the element of comradeship, have more than occasionally failed to make sufficient allowance for the gulf between differing temperaments. The robust, man's-man type is likely to retain a less acute impression of mental agony than a person of a less sanguine nature. Yet there is no evidence that either type is more valuable than the other in modern warfare, and if the sharp sensitive impression has been more frequently set down, it is for the reason that the physical type is less articulate. Practised readers will also appreciate that agonizing experiences, when set down by A in the slow medium of written words, may make a more definite impression upon B's mind, when he reads them, than B received at first-hand from somewhat similar experiences personally encountered on war service.

Finally, on these controversial matters, there is a further relevant question: If the general tenor of the War-books is as false as a minority of objectors has declared, why should they have been read so widely and with such general approval, considering that a high proportion of the readers must have been ex-soldiers who had themselves experienced the War unsentimentally and with a first-hand knowledge of its actualities? The sanest, best-balanced, least-prejudiced consideration of the War-books, in pointing out that even the worst of them dwell just as much on the quiet heroism and comradeship of the trenches as upon other matters, remarked also:

> The argument mainly used against the frank war book is that it portrays the British soldier in an unfavourable light. Any book which did that unnecessarily or unfairly would deserve discredit. But what book does? Wild stuff is written to the Press asserting that this or

[1] Mary Lee's *It's a Great War* attempted to suggest the intolerable tedium of war, but the reception given to it by the critics in England was not encouraging.

that book holds up a picture of the British army as an army of drunkards or libertines. Which war book, we repeat, does this? None that we have read, and we have read by this time a score and more, of a rich and ripe variety. Sir Philip Gibbs asks dramatically, 'Was it an army of debauchees?' Of course it wasn't! What is more, no writer of war books, so far as we know, has ever suggested it was. What some of them have done is to say that under the strain of modern war, with its almost intolerable combination of danger and boredom, men often got drunk; that many of them sought relief in the company of women; that they swore violently; that they felt fear and bitterness; that now and then one of them cracked under the strain and was guilty of cowardice or desertion; that sometimes senior officers were hated by their juniors, and juniors by men under them; and so on, and so on. What word of this is not simple truth—was not common knowledge to every fighting man between 1914 and 1918? Not one, of course. What is all the excitement about?[1]

Few who had first-hand experience in the lower ranks of the army between 1914 and 1918 will wish to add to this or to subtract.

§ 2.—*Foreign Witnesses*

The prosecution of war depends not only upon man's pugnacity but also upon his tenacity. A prolonged war demands the utmost intensification of both. While the pugnacious instinct may land any man into a fight, he will not continue to fight indefinitely unless his tenacity is braced by other impulses. Where the quarrel is direct and personal the desire for victory (independently of the cause of quarrel) or a dogged determination not to acknowledge defeat, may inspire him to prolong the fight, but in a modern national war the personal factor is so remote that external means

[1] *The Week-end Review*, May 3rd, 1930. For the expression of varying opinions see *The Times* correspondence columns (April 7th, 1930, and later dates) and leading article (April 10th, 1930); *The Times Literary Supplement* (June 12th, 1930, pp. 485-6); *Time and Tide* (articles by St. John Ervine, May 9th, 1930, pp. 595-8, and May 16th, pp. 629-32).

have to be employed to stimulate passion.[1] Hence propaganda.

Wartime propaganda in England had three main phases. First, the chivalric phase, when men were inspired to go to war partly to succour Belgium, and partly to uphold the sacredness of treaty engagements which Germany had broken by invading neutral territory. Second, the patriotic phase, when the necessity of saving the country from the risk of German dominance was uppermost. And third (when war-weariness was acute) the barbaric phase, which led to the intensification of reports of German savagery and included the corpse-factory story. Vilification of the enemy is, of course, a factor in all modern warfare, and was as much practised in Germany and elsewhere as in England throughout the years from 1914 to 1918. But whereas the reports of German atrocities in Belgium in 1914 were the product of natural panic when they were not true, later charges against Germany had more the appearance of deliberate invention.

Nation will only continue in a death grip with another nation so long as each is convinced that its enemy is entirely unlike itself and a savage menace. To create and preserve that conviction is the first principle of modern wartime propaganda. And it is possible that if nations could be made permanently proof against the idea embodied in that conviction, wars would be infinitely less easy to foment than they are now.

The value to us of foreign War-books, and the value of British War-books to foreigners, must be determined by the extent to which they implant the belief that the fundamental likeness between men and women of various nationalities is greater than the sum of superficial differences.

[1] '. . . The change that was coming over the war, the induration from a personal crusade into a vast machine of violence'.—Edmund Blunden: *Undertones of War*, Ch. VII.

('The brotherhood of man' is a suspect phrase, even among the many who might wish to use it, because it is repeated too glibly and often represents little more than cheap sentimental humanitarianism; while sometimes it has a class bias which negatives the principle it is supposed to embody.)

To make reference only to those foreign War-books which have been translated into English would require a whole volume, and choice has here been deliberately limited to a very few, without any implied suggestion that these are the best. 'Best', indeed, is an inappropriate word in this connexion, since the determination of ultimate (as distinct from immediate) value depends upon more factors than it is possible for us who are still in the shadow of the War to balance fairly.

But if, rashly, an attempt be made at comparative valuation as literature, it does not seem possible to place any continental War-book above Henri Barbusse's *Under Fire*.[1] Though this 'story of a squad' was published four years before the 'twenties began it is one of the type of 'realistic' War-novels that belongs particularly to this later decade: yet with a difference. *Under Fire* shrinks from nothing in the endeavour to suggest the fatigue, the tedium, the horror of war, but the book is heroic as well as realistic in mood. As a general rule, the characters in the War-books are not memorable as persons: they are either types or so 'ordinary' as to be indistinguishable in a general pattern which is more important than the separate individualities composing it. Barbusse's characters have a richer personality, and they are created in mass, as it were, not drawn in line. Even the garments—or *particularly* the garments might be more accurate—of these French infantrymen become permanently carved in the memory. There are all the familiar warmth-giving paddings of the trenches:

[1] *Le Feu* (published Paris, 1916), translated in Everyman's Library.

—all these things mask and magnify the men, and wipe out their uniforms almost as effectively as their skins. One has fastened on his back a square of linoleum, with a big draughtboard pattern in white and red, that he found in the middle of the dining-room of some temporary refuge. That is Pépin. We know him afar off by his harlequin placard sooner even than by his Apache face. Here is Barque's bulging chest-protector, carven from an eiderdown quilt, formerly pink, but now fantastically bleached and mottled by dust and rain. There Lamuse the Huge rises like a ruined tower to which tattered posters still cling.

Inwardly, Barbusse's warriors are Great-War soldiers as any private of whatever nationality knew them in the comrades he had round him daily: ready to shirk fatigues but not to dodge danger when other lives are at stake. Practically every phase of the French soldier's life is in *Under Fire*—his miseries, his consolations, his questionings, his convictions and aspirations. It is not too much to say that if no other front-line War-book had been written, the material for the historian is here when in the future he seeks to capture imaginatively the 'feel' of the fighting-man's daily experience. The discussions of war, its causes and purposes, among these French soldiers are the counterpart of those among the Germans in *All Quiet*. Looking back and remembering the intense passions stirred by the War, it is the moral courage of *Under Fire* that impresses as much as its other remarkable merits. To have published this book in the middle of the War-period and to have been clear-sighted enough to put into the mouths of French soldiers these sentences: '"... To-day militarism is called Germany." "Yes, but what will it be called to-morrow?"' made *Under Fire* prophetic as well as courageous. Its rare quality as literature comes from the author's ability to elevate the men's sufferings to the plane of high tragedy, avoiding altogether the thin note of hysteria.

Like other early writers of War-books Barbusse was too soon to receive due attention. In 1916 people wanted to

get the War ended, not to hear the truth about it.[1] In the years following 1918, the War was ended and they wanted to forget it. Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* coincided in time with the restoration of acute feelings to numbed minds and sensibilities. Most part of what Remarque did had been done a dozen years before and done better by Barbusse, yet Remarque's book was valuable as setting down the recollections and convictions of the generation which was old enough to fight in the War but was then too young to articulate its emotions in literary form. *All Quiet* was the first of what delicately humorous critics afterwards made it their custom to refer to as 'the latrine school of War-fiction'. It would be interesting (and to those critics it might be surprisingly informative) to know in how many instances the shock of finding privacy violated in army latrines was the first step toward that breaking-down of normal decency which war conditions compel. Trained and unprejudiced readers will not doubt, from the general temper of his writing, that Remarque is clean-minded, sincere, and innocent of desire to exploit unsavoury incidents for the sake of their unsavouriness. Yet, to the disgrace of English criticism, that and worse charges were brought against him by British reviewers and others. *All Quiet* is not a masterpiece, as it was proclaimed in some quarters to be—it has not the requisite qualities of calm strength and emotional maturity—but it is what it means to be: a document of destroyed youth. If he had aimed for literary permanence, Remarque would

[1] Barbusse's definition (*Under Fire*, Ch. XXIV)—'War is frightful and unnatural weariness, water up to the belly, mud and dung and infamous filth. It is befouled faces and tattered flesh, it is the corpses that are no longer like corpses even, floating on the ravenous earth. It is that, that endless monotony of misery broken by poignant tragedies; it is that and not the bayonet glittering like silver, nor the bugle's chanticleer to the sun'—might be the text for all the later realistic War-books.

have done better to omit certain incidents that are so unlikely as to be no doubt true—for it is the custom of truth to outrage probability. The hospital episode of Lewandowski and his wife is an example in point. Though the incident is related with such bare simplicity as to give it tragic force, it is irrelevant in the narrative, and dirty minds, incapable of pity, have found in it the occasion for lewd sniggering. But *All Quiet* need not be discussed as formal literature. For the younger generation it was a spiritual and emotional purgative and as such its justification is beyond question.

In *Class 1902*, Ernst Glaeser not only provides a picture of War-time civilian Germany; he also gives a remarkable analysis of the adolescent mind. Allowing for the deeper preoccupation and the more solemnly introspective nature of German boys as compared with English, there is still an unusual proportion of general truth in the narrator's self-portrait. Here again, and with less excuse than in Remarque, there is too little emotional control, but much of the book is admirably done and the final episodes are managed with beautiful simplicity and restraint. This book should increase the number of wise and sympathetic parents.

The Case of Sergeant Grischa is a much more considerable literary feat than either of the foregoing. Arnold Zweig uses irony where they rely upon emotional intensity, and his canvas is altogether bigger than theirs. Despite an occasional submission to the tendency to over-write,[1] Zweig has produced an extremely good novel which is, incidentally, a good War-novel also; but its merit does not lie primarily in war interest. Neither Grischa nor Babka will be readily forgotten; nor will the pages which describe Grischa's journeyings.

[1] See, for example, the opening paragraph; and in parts of the otherwise impressive description of Grischa's death.

The human value of all these books is that, in them, French and German and Russian are seen to be, fundamentally, like ourselves. Though the recognition of this fact may not prevent war, war does at least become one degree less endurable if the fighters, having no personal quarrel, realize that those killed are in essentials no different from those who kill. As a complement to Zweig's tragic irony there is wildly comic satire on military officialdom and its absurdity in Josef Hasek's *The Good Soldier Schweik* —a Czecho-Slovakian extravaganza aimed against Austria. There is, to the English taste, a little too much of Schweik,[1] but better too much than none at all. Prospectively it might seem impossible to write a bearable funny book about the War while it is still a vivid memory; but whatever the propriety of impassioned indignation and tragic despair, there is no doubt that Hasek was right in choosing to create a clown to deflate the military pomposity and tyranny under which his countrymen suffered at the hands of Austria. The least effective passages in his book are those in which, under stress, he lowers for a moment the comic mask, and spits out some bitter comment.

§ 3.—*The Gentlemen's War*

Modern warfare has little room for chivalry, yet even under the conditions it imposes there are still men in all armies who endeavour to fight like gentlemen and not like savages. Those who hate war do their cause no good by sneering at instances of chivalry recorded in connexion with the late War, but it is desirable to distinguish between chivalry and sentimentality.

There are two conceptions of a 'gentlemen's war'. One, the better, is inherent throughout Edmund Blunden's

[1] Actually Hasek died while *Schweik* was still only a fragment of the enormous comic prose epic he intended it to be.

Undertones of War; the other is displayed in R. C. Sherriff's *Journey's End*. As an example of dramatic craftsmanship this play was a model of neatness, economy, and force; but it sentimentalized war, and the famous Somme dug-out was a replica of any good public-school—narrower, dirtier, and more dangerous. All the stock public-school figures appeared in it: the attitude, emotions, and psychology derived wholly from public-school standards. It is an illuminating comment upon the mentality of some who protested publicly against the 'falsity' and libellous character of War-novels and plays, that they commonly exempted *Journey's End* from their strictures. Yet in this play Stanhope, the drunken officer, is idealized; and the piece, whatever its merits, certainly 'falsifies' as much in one direction as the 'blood and mud' school do in the other. If the emotional standards in *Journey's End* are true, they are not adult emotions. If they are intended to represent adult emotions, then there is a considerable degree of (doubtless unconscious) falsification. The bombast of Stanhope's unfulfilled threat to Hibbert is non-adult; so is the whole business of the letter which Stanhope demands from Raleigh to censor. Raleigh's emotional standards need not be discussed. He *is* a schoolboy—by age and experience, in his admiration of Stanhope, and in his delight at finding that Osborne had played 'rugger' for England. Stanhope, of course, also came straight from school to the army, and had had no opportunity of proceeding to adult emotional standards under normal conditions. But the author makes no dramatic or ironic use of this point. He does not (as he well might, with tragically ironic effect) cause the audience to meditate upon the circumstance that her War was being fought and her national destinies swayed by young men who had been given no chance to reach emotional maturity. *Journey's End* has, from a different angle, no fewer faults than other examples of War fiction—

sentimentality, falsification, hysteria ; it omits most of the filth, the agony, the obscenity, and the major blasphemies—whether with a gain or a loss of truthfulness must be left to individual judgment to determine. To deal in this manner with an unpretentious play would be as indecent as to dismember a butterfly, if it were not for the desirability of suggesting that what the anti-War-book publicists desire is not really 'the truth about the War' but that particular kind of half-truth they find most palatable.

Journey's End is, in other respects, only less than a masterpiece. Hardy and Trotter are both drawn with wonderful skill and observation, and with convincing humour. The cook's humour, though brilliant, is not convincing. He becomes a comic chorus, and as such, a lay figure after his first few appearances. Osborne is a less original example of characterization than Trotter. His function is so obviously to offset by strength and stability the more volatile genius of Stanhope, that he has only occasionally an independent existence. The scene between Osborne and Raleigh immediately before the raid is very striking: sentiment there does not overweigh truth. But comment upon a play which has had such unequalled popularity as *Journey's End*, and for such reasons, can be little more than speculative. The 'truth' about *Journey's End* will be more clearly distinguished in 1940.

Edmund Blunden's *Undertones of War* is not the work of 'a soldier and a man', but of a better creature—an English poet and an honest gentleman. It only lapses from full and complete honesty of statement when that characteristically English super-honesty—understatement—comes uppermost. Here, emphatically, are *under*tones, sounded on a human instrument so sensitive and fine that it will not reproduce harsh and violent noises. The first words are perfectly on the note which is kept throughout: 'I was not anxious to go. . . . There was something about France in those days

which looked to me, despite all journalistic enchanters, to be dangerous.' Here are neither heroics nor loud complainings against fate. Here, if anywhere, is a gentleman at war. And yet here, also, is the horror of war in complete nakedness—horror unmitigated by sentiment and unmagnified by sensationalism or hysteria—cold horror: 'I looked in early at my store dug-out to decide how many duckboards were needed to make up the proper reserve. I looked in. The sun gleamed through the crannies there on the unutterably mangled heads and half-naked bloody bodies of the poor fellows . . . who had been carried there to await burial.' As one of the mottoes for this book Edmund Blunden selects No. xxxvii from the Articles of the Church of England: 'It is lawful for Christian men, at the commandment of the Magistrate, to wear weapons and serve in the wars.' . . . Blunden was a schoolboy officer: 'a harmless young shepherd in a soldier's coat', 'still too young to know the war's depth of ironic cruelty', as he says on the last page of *Undertones*. And of such, in fair part, were the conflicting agents of death. Two other small pictures[1] may close these desultory remarks concerning a book that will last:

They . . . went to and fro in the exact and ordinary manner of the British working man. One, by turns, stayed at home to cook; the others kept the line tidy. . . . They enjoyed this form of active service with pathetic delight—and what men were they? Willing, shy, mostly rather like invalids, thinking of their families . . . they were all doomed. . . .

I heard an evening robin in a hawthorn, and in trampled gardens among the refuse of war there was the fairy, affectionate immortality of the yellow rose and blue-grey crocus.

[1] Ch. XI.

When critical objections and patriotic superlatives of abuse have been exhausted against *Death of a Hero*, Richard Aldington's book will still remain as important a document as any published in the nineteen-twenties. It exactly expressed the mood of thousands in England, and served as a drainage channel for the suppressed indignations which had troubled them. If its picture of pre-War England is distorted, the distortion is that of a sick man whose fever changes the appearances and proportions of things, and whose sickness was caused by the conjunction of circumstances he now sees with such apparent disproportion. 'I have a vendetta of the dead against the living . . . an unappeased longing for vengeance.' [1] 'The whole world is blood-guilty, cursed like Orestes, and mad, and destroying itself. . . . Somehow we must atone, somehow we must free ourselves from the curse—the blood-guiltiness.' [2] Hysteria? Yes; but understandable and justifiable hysteria. The brutal passionate invective of *Death of a Hero* blew like a strong bitter wind through a charnel house.

Both in *Death of a Hero* and in Robert Graves' *Goodbye to All That* the reawakened energy of the exhausted soldiers is turned against the British machinery of control and not against the former enemy. In any future Hardyesque epic-drama of the World War, the Spirits Sinister and Ironic will have material to hand in Graves' record of the way in which peace-time regimental customs and caste distinctions were insisted upon in certain units in France.[3] After being submitted to calculated schoolboyish snubs at the mess-table by senior officers, Robert Graves records that he said under his breath: '"You damned snobs. I'll survive you all. There'll come a time when there won't be one of you left serving in the battalion to remember battalion mess at Laventie." This time came, exactly a year later.' [4]

[1] Part II, p. 6.
[2] Prologue.
[3] Ch. XVI, pp. 166 ff.
[4] Ibid.

This and other passages in *Good-bye to All That* and in *Death of a Hero* confirm the soldiers' common experience that wantonly exasperating behaviour (in the name of discipline!) by senior ranks did more than enemy action or any war hardships to undermine *morale* and to sow the seed of post-War bitterness.[1]

The denial of what were described as 'allegations' in the War-books was simple so long as the authors were confined to those who had served in a junior capacity during the War. Some complication was introduced, however, when a staff-officer, Brigadier-General F. P. Crozier, declared that war was responsible for more evils than any of the juniors had suggested. *A Brass Hat in No Man's Land* suffers as literature through having been written by an unliterary hand, but that does not affect its value as a record of war experiences. General Crozier, as a long-service pre-War officer, insists that blood-lust must be implanted in soldiers as an essential part of their war training,[2] and he believes that war serves to 'break-up the moral fibres of society or of civilization itself'.[3] But though he insists that war is a cause of moral disintegration, and hides none of its beastly consequences, *A Brass Hat* is much more a record of fine men who did their duty with unflagging courage under desperately difficult conditions, than it is of the outcasts of war.

The standard for War-books (of a pseudo-fictional type) as *literature* was set as early as 1924 in R. H. Mottram's *The Spanish Farm*,[4] which has the distinction among English War-novels of being more remarkable for its characters (at least for one character, Madeleine), than for its narrative of experiences. Most other War-novels are excused for faults of construction on account of their descriptive power or

[1] See, also, the canteen incident in *Her Privates We*, § XIV, pp. 345 ff.
[2] Ch. II. [3] Ch. VI.
[4] Later issued with other related novels as *The Spanish Farm Trilogy*.

prophetic quality, but *The Spanish Farm* needs no such excuse. It has a particular, not a generalized, setting; and Madeleine, the French farming woman, is the unifying centre of the whole trilogy. Mottram sees the French without illusion but also without the disgust other writers have shown.[1] What some might consider as contemptible cupidity, Mottram enables us to see from the French standpoint as a reasonable and prudential regard for money as the means of life. *The Spanish Farm* is the most dispassionate and detached War-novel so far published in England. Madeleine is prepared to take life and the world and men and women on their own level. She accepts their standard of values but pays only her own price for what she requires of life. Generous in giving when and where she desires to give, she is otherwise cold, hard, deliberate and calculating, and she has no compunction about securing what she wants at the cost of make-believe affection. Yet her character is created so vividly and with such swift assurance that we see clearly into her motives. Her point of view is so firmly established that she is an entirely sympathetic figure, in spite of the mercenary side to her emotional nature—which has also a romantic side. Madeleine stands up to life, deals with life in whatever currency it happens to proffer at the moment, and when life hits her she hits back. Her courage is indomitable; her efficiency absolute.

The most impressive piece of plain narrative concerning events in France is Herbert Read's *In Retreat*, an officer's personal account of the retirement of the British Fifth Army from St. Quentin in March 1918. Though short (about thirty pages only), it has epic force and grandeur in its very plainness, and is unforgettable.

At the opposite extreme, and not less good in its altogether different way, is W. F. Morris' *Bretherton*, an adventure-mystery war-novel with an admirably ingenious and

[1] See, e.g., Graves, *Goodbye to All That*, Ch. XVI, pp. 215–16.

leak-proof plot. This book combines a brilliant exercise of creative imagination with a remarkable ability to reproduce, vividly, first-hand experiences, and there is one brief battle-scene in *Bretherton* which is masterly.

§ 3.—*The Great Inarticulate*

Private 19022 wrote *Her Privates We* and Private X wrote *War is War*, but the British private soldier's tale of himself between 1914 and 1918 is still untold. A man of letters does not become a private soldier by the simple step of enlisting, nor can he do it in any other way. He remains throughout an educated and imaginative man to whom the War was an experience different from that which the uneducated unimaginative passed through; and however socially mixed the army may have been, the latter type is properly meant by the term 'private'. Unless it should chance to be done almost casually through the medium of slow and fragmentary dictation, it is probable that the British private's view of the War will never be given at length. If it is not given at all, the misfortune will be equivalent to the loss we should have suffered if the early English ballads and folk-songs had not been collected. Happily, collections have been made of the soldiers' self-originated or self-adapted Wartime songs. To the best of these collections [1] the editors have added a glossary of soldiers' slang which, in its detailed definitions, throws a great deal of valuable light upon the private soldier's mind and his attitude to the War: in fact, from this source alone, a portrait of him could be reconstructed. It would be a composite portrait and, aided by reference to the songs, it would show the British private as absolutely disillusioned about himself, his superiors, and his job; as capable of the stickiest sentimentality; as

[1] *Songs and Slang of the British Soldier: 1914-1918.* Edited by John Brophy and Eric Partridge.

possessed of endless fortitude and tenacity; and as meaninglessly blasphemous and obscene. To omit the blasphemy and obscenity from any verbal portrait of the British private is to distort the picture. The inclusion of this feature would be nauseating to the home circle—but why should the squeamishness of the home circle be always considered? It would be less nauseating to read, say, three hundred pages interspersed with blasphemy and obscenity than it was actually to hear such conversation for years on end. Let us be given (it need be once only) *The Complete British Private* [1] for general contemplation in the home circle, so that the majority may have at least a speaking acquaintance with the War.

Except what may be learnt from the War-time songs, literature so far provides only *external* pictures of the private in the War. And since War-books dealing with the Western Front necessarily have a common likeness, there is little more to say of them, beyond suggesting the relative merit of those not already considered. *Her Privates We* is, so far, undoubtedly the finest book of its kind which has come out of the War—and possibly, in its kind, nothing finer can be done. It is full, honest, and written with the utmost literary skill: its prose is at once exalted and solidly earthy. Companionship and courage take their proper place, and the soldier's life is represented 'in the round'. From the very first sentences it is clear that this is to be a book which penetrates beyond blood and clamour to the spiritual resistances that give whatever meaning there is to the tragedy of war. The central character, Bourne, though a private, belongs to the officer class, and is about to receive a commission when he is killed. His companion privates are excellently drawn, in their good and bad qualities alike. But again

[1] *The Middle Parts of Fortune* (the original unexpurgated version of *Her Privates We*) gives a whole portrait, but the edition was limited and is not generally available.

it must be said that an educated man, and especially one who can draw five-pound cheques at will upon the chaplain, does not experience quite the same war as the common 'full private' knows. There is nothing in the text of *Her Privates We* [1] so bitter and tormentedly savage as the title. When their exact implication is realized those three words seem a vituperative curse hurled at war-makers.

However absurdly inappropriate it may seem to say of any War-book that it is ill-mannered, this is the appropriate comment to make on *War is War*. Most of the protests made by Private X needed to be made, but aired as a crop of personal animosities they weaken the effect.[2] A clever book, spoiled by its manner, yet containing at least one battle description that 'lives' more than do most such passages in the War-books.[3]

'It hadn't been such a bad time, taken all round,' is John Bullock's conclusion as he sits in the park minus a leg. Henry Williamson tells John Bullock's story in *The Patriot's Progress*, and his story is almost naked agony. Yet the agony was dulled after a few months and John Bullock 'never wanted to hear of it again'. No other writer gets into such intimate contact with the sensations and thoughts of the private soldier as Henry Williamson does in this book. Overmuch compression leads to a too saturated concentration of agony for the record to be right in its proportions, but *The Patriot's Progress* comes near to making the Great Inarticulate fully expressive.

H. M. Tomlinson and C. E. Montague were both in the War, yet they were, in the best sense, 'above the conflict'. They both lived to write masterpieces about the great tragedy—Montague's *Disenchantment* and Tomlinson's *All*

[1] *Hamlet*, Act II, Scene 2.

[2] e.g., *ad nauseam*, 'The rum put new life into me (sorry, Mr. Stiggins!) . . .', Ch. XX, p. 275.

[3] Ch. X, pp. 132 ff.

Our Yesterdays—which are more than War-books, for their authors saw deeper and beyond any single war to the infection of war in the race: both books are products of the philosophic mind. *Disenchantment* is written on a definite theme, stated in its title, but it is as large as life itself and Shakespearean in its stretch. Though every page invites comment and discussion, as a really good book must, there is no need to say more of it here. *Disenchantment* is already a classic and indispensable.

All Our Yesterdays begins with the Boer War and ends with the Armistice, combining in its course history, prophecy, satire, and fiction. Considered as a work of literary art, it is less nearly perfect than Montague's book, for its excellence is episodic rather than continuous. The launching of the great ship;[1] the prophetic dream-parable;[2] the visit of the French colonel to the English officers' mess;[3] in these Tomlinson is at his unique best. And since the civilian Great Inarticulate at home had its tragic part in the world-conflict as well as its fighting children abroad, it is proper that these should have so moving and beautiful a tribute as they indirectly receive through the description in *All Our Yesterdays* of Mr. and Mrs. Bolt's bearing under the pain of their son's death.[4]

[1] Part I, Ch. II. [2] I, IV. [3] IV, XII. [4] V, XV.

CHAPTER VIII

BIOGRAPHICAL EXCURSIONS

THOUGH opinions of Lytton Strachey's merits as a biographer differ widely in England, it cannot be gainsaid that the interest he created was to a great extent responsible for the reawakened interest in biography throughout the nineteen-twenties. Probably no other writer in this century has had a greater reputed influence than Strachey; yet probably, also, no writer has had less *direct* influence. This is not because others have not attempted to repeat his successes, and in his way. But Lytton Strachey has special gifts and a personal technique unnoted by some imitators; while, when these characteristics are noted, they turn out to be inimitable. Strangely enough, what is imitable has not been generally imitated: namely his deliberate brevity and his careful choice of such specific aspects as enable personality to be exhibited in the most brilliant light. Biographers apparently cannot cure themselves of long-windedness; and apparently nearly all wish to write as much as they possibly can about the biographee. There have been exceptions. Harold Nicolson's *Swinburne* [1] and *Byron: The Last Journey*; H. I'Anson Faussett's *Tennyson*; St. John Ervine's *Parnell*; and (the most brilliant example of biography-in-brief done in the decade) A. J. A. Symons' *Baron Corvo* [2]—in which the writer had, however, an exceptionally attractive and unusual subject. All these were outside the range of what might be called 'journeyman biography', and were written

[1] English Men of Letters Series (1926).
[2] *Life and Letters*, July 1928.

by men who write well whatever their topic. What would have been much more profitable for English literature is some sign of understanding in mortuary biographies, and among those who commission such works, that any *Life* can be and should be attractive as literature. Whenever men of letters turned in the nineteen-twenties to occasional essays in biography (as in the examples cited above) the Strachey note was heard; but when the deaths occurred of notables whose lives *had* to be written, little evidence was forthcoming that the general standard of such journeyman biography is now higher than in the last century.

If we are to be compelled to make a permanent distinction between literary biography and journeyman biography, the consequence will be a doubly unfortunate one. Must literary brilliance be reserved for figures from the past capriciously resurrected, and none be given to contemporaries? Perhaps it must inevitably be so, on account of the material which cannot be used (or is not made available) while others implicated are still alive. But if the contemporary biographer is not in a position to tell the whole truth, his aim should at least be to write a permanently interesting book. Actually, the mortality-rate among biographies must be as high as among works of fiction.

Between Lytton Strachey and most Victorian biographers there is this marked difference: The Victorians wrote biographies in order to demonstrate that great men and great women are great because of their greatness. Lytton Strachey often demonstrates that, on the contrary, great men and great women are great in spite of their littleness—a demonstration that, far from being pert or belittling, is enheartening and exhilarating. However much, intellectually, the present generation may wish for *pure biography*—biography that proves nothing in regard to matters of

conduct or belief—it is in practice impossible to get it except in the rarest instances. Though it may be out of fashion to recommend *From Log Cabin to White House* as an inducement to the young to go and do likewise, we nevertheless incline to look upon the littleness of greatness not with a sneer at those others but with hope for ourselves. We are very little interested in the exaltation of the lowly, but we do find a special interest in the humanity of the great. Victorian biographers dehumanized their great men. We attempt to lay bare the humanity and leave the greatness to take care of itself, as it always will if the humanity is preserved.

In so far as Lytton Strachey's books are written in conformity with a thesis, they are to that extent out of sharp focus. He claims only to 'lay bare'—to expose—imposing nothing, proposing nothing. But in the endeavour to lay bare (motives, or springs of action, or whatsoever) he is in fact proposing something which is disturbing to most. When he says, in effect, 'I am going to do nothing more than show these people as they were,' he appears to ignore the important, if deplorable, fact that we are totally unaccustomed to seeing people 'as they are' in the sight of the Absolute. And while Lytton Strachey proceeds with his laying-bare the reader is often more engrossed by the exposer and the exposure than by the subject. In his three principal books,[1] Lytton Strachey's mind and Lytton Strachey's art preoccupy us, and we are more thrilled by the brilliant performance than by the *material* used by the performer. The biographer's art, properly considered, consists in *the presentation of facts* in such a manner that the reader's interest is continuously sustained. An exact analysis in the light of all the material that was available to him would show that Strachey does not so much *present* as *arrange* facts. He does not distort facts. It is possible, however,

[1] *Eminent Victorians, Queen Victoria, Elizabeth and Essex.*

by putting one chosen fact over against another chosen fact, or by arranging facts to produce a pattern for literary effect, to suggest a significance the facts may not have borne in actuality. Few readers are in a position to say whether Lytton Strachey's portraits are or are not more accurate likenesses than those produced by other writers. Is his Queen Elizabeth 'truer' than the customary romantic picture; truer than Spenser's Gloriana, or than Shakespeare's 'vestal throned in the West'? We cannot say. We can only watch with a special interest the present-day tendency to abolish 'the heroic in history'.

Newspapers have ruined what Americans might call 'this hero business'. A condition for hero-worship is not to know too much about the heroes. Since the Press took to telling everything about eminent persons, and more especially since wireless broadcasting brought them within earshot, the heroic has gone. We cannot lionize our rulers—they are only slightly larger and sometimes duller editions of ourselves; so we lionize our entertainers—who live in a different world and are of a noble stature in that world of paint and pasteboard. So the idea develops: that if present-day leaders are 'not much', if Mr. Lloyd MacDonaldwin is one of ourselves, then perhaps past heroes would not have been of heroic stature in relation to *us*. Along this line, most probably, has grown by slow stages the changed view of history and historical personages which is so often evident in recent 'revaluations' of the past—and which is also accountable for some part of the current spirit of despair. A generation without faith in men or gods is shuttered within itself:[1] hero-worship, like religious faith, is a means of release.

[1] It is interesting to speculate as to whether the English have truly lost the capacity for hero-worship, or are only awaiting a hero. Would a Mussolini or a Lenin appear as heroic in England to English people as in Italy and Russia to Italians and Russians?

The dethronement of the heroic and the accession of the human, account, no doubt, for the popularity in England and America of Emil Ludwig's *Napoleon*—supposed by some to be in the Strachey mode but actually a violation of nearly all the English writer's principles, and probably written without any intent to follow him; though it is not unreasonable to suspect that Ludwig is familiar both with Strachey and André Maurois. He began nearly ten years before the modern revival in biography, his *Bismarck* being published (Berlin) in 1911. From *Napoleon* (Berlin, 1925) onward Ludwig seems to combine the functions of the undertaker and the wine-merchant—attempting to infuse the champagne standard into lead, oak or elm. He tries, that is to say, to unite the methods used in the very long painstaking nineteenth-century biography with those of the twentieth-century selective, dramatic, ironical short study. He is immensely detailed and exhaustive, and unless the English translation of *Napoleon* misrepresents him his style is untidily diffuse.

Ludwig professes a scrupulous care for accuracy and deprecates any encroachment by biographers upon the novelist's privilege of improvisation. Yet his own method brings him in almost constant touch with the boundary between biography and fiction, and sometimes must surely carry him across it, as when he introduces those vitalizing touches which come from the creative imagination and not from documentary records. For example:

> Bonaparte rides slowly across the desert sands to look upon the face of the Sphinx. The eyes of stone and eyes of steel meet. Like the Sphinx, he knows how to be silent, but we can guess his thoughts.
>
> 'Alexander stood here. Caesar stood here. They lived two thousand years after this image was sculptured, as I live two thousand years after them. Immeasurable empires, consecrated to the sun, extended around the Nile. Millions obeyed the will of one. What the ruler dreamed, was fashioned by his slaves with their myriad hands.

Everything was possible to him. The king was the son of the gods. All obeyed him as the descendant of the original conqueror. Because that first conqueror named himself king, and son of the gods, all believed him. Here, in the East, it is possible to say to human beings, "I am your god," and all believe. Europe is a mole-hill.' [1]

Ludwig begins [2] with 'the concept of a character and searches the archives for what is, at bottom, the corroboration of an intuition'. The danger and the temptation in this method are obvious. If it should happen that the biographer's preliminary concept is wrong, does he reject it in deference to the verdict given by the archives? Does he altogether overcome the temptation to give greater importance to what seems to confirm his intuition, than to whatever might seem to shake it? Such questions are probably not important, however. Those who read contemporary popularized biography have no close eye for accuracy, and no student now or in the future is likely to regard such books as historical sources. The worst that can be said about the New Biography is that it resurrects the dead to enliven a library-subscriber's week-end. Ludwig certainly humanizes his great men, and offsets the common impression that Napoleon was mainly a war-lord by giving full weight and emphasis to his other activities: he founded and consolidated States, made laws and love, and handled a large and troublesome crowd of relatives. This long heavy book was popular, no doubt, because it does not set up the Napoleon *legend* at the beginning. It does not start with the assumption that Napoleon was in his great days a demi-god, and then seek to explain all his actions as the actions of a demi-god in the making. Ludwig's success is due to his concern with 'human standards',[3] and to the correspondence of his own interests with the widespread contemporary desire that biographers should undress

[1] Book II, XIV. [2] See preface to his *Genius and Character*.
[3] *Genius and Character*, p. 13 ff.

and explain the one-time heroes, not veil and do homage to them. If, apart from his encumbered style, one has a doubt about Ludwig, it is because his declared method runs counter to the modern biographer's ideal line of approach as set down by André Maurois :

> ' Here is a man. I possess a certain number of documents, a certain amount of evidence about him. I am going to attempt to draw a true portrait. What will this portrait be ? I have no idea. I don't want to know before I have actually drawn it. I am prepared to accept whatever a prolonged contemplation of my subject may reveal to me, and to correct it in proportion to such new facts as I discover.' [1]

Maurois's devotion to English subjects in his biographical studies has made him, almost, a figure in modern English literature, as well as in French. His *Ariel : a Shelley Romance*, for brevity, grace of style, and brilliant presentation, is closer to the Lytton Strachey mode than any other book. It is rigidly selective and concerned with aspects only—perhaps ironically so, since Maurois cannot really have been so much engrossed by Shelley the amorist as to forget almost wholly Shelley the poet. His study of Disraeli, if less dazzling as literature, is more serviceable as biography, while at the same time providing a more entertaining and vivid portrait than is given in Maurois's *Byron*—a ' sound ' book, but deficient in the simmering vitality and controlled audacity of style that are a source of stimulus and a delight in his earlier books.

American post-War biographers have been endlessly industrious, with little sign of significant result. Gamaliel Bradford's earlier biographical sketches in *Confederate Portraits* have not sufficient literary attraction to make them notable outside America where their subjects are of closer interest ; *Damaged Souls* and *Bare Souls* fortunately do not

[1] *Aspects of Biography*, Ch. I.

fulfil the disturbing promise of their titles with such determination as might have been feared; and the *D. L. Moody* is a disappointingly missed opportunity. No modern biographer who is also an able literary artist could wish for a better subject than Moody. His life could be written with a full measure of sympathy for his convictions and at the same time with close and rewarding desire to analyse the intensely interesting psychology problem propounded by Moody's mind. Gamaliel Bradford, however, has made little more than a bald narrative from the material provided.

W. E. Woodward's *Washington: the Image and the Man* would be as good as any biography that came out of America in the nineteen-twenties, if it did not count too much upon the 'debunking' process that has been in some other directions so valuable. To deflate pomposity and sentimental heroics, to clear away the barnacles of legend, is to do good service to the memory of the great. W. E. Woodward, however, is inclined to be too self-consciously determined to debunk Washington: to hammer at his weaknesses and his less amiable qualities as though they must be subtracted from his strength and virtue before Washington's balance-sheet can be made up. The worth of great men is not assessed according to a system of metaphysical book-keeping. And this particular biographer has, too, an irritating habit of self-intrusion, and of decorative touches.[1] These blemishes are more than a little unfortunate because in other respects Woodward's *Washington* is a commendable and mainly a successful attempt to make Washington relive. If his shortcomings—mainly his preoccupation with 'material success, with practical details, with money, land, authority'—had been displayed as part of the pattern of his character, and not fussily worried by the author, the

[1] e.g. 'During that winter in Philadelphia, Venus cuddled in the lap of Mars.'

book might have been a valuable addition to modern American biography.

The American publishers boosted Francis Hackett's *Henry VIII* so blaringly that anyone familiar with the publicity campaign may be excused the suspicion that a new biography of Henry was projected with an eye to the 'sales value' of six wives. Each wife has a portrait and a chapter-title to herself, though the balance of interest is by no means so definitely attached to the wives as these external indications would suggest. This book is a long, full, carefully prepared survey of the life and times of Henry VIII. It is too long and too full; in style it is often thoroughly bad. A first principle of good writing is *progress*. Francis Hackett, however, allows the narrative to sit down lumpily for pages at a time while he discourses on a multitude of matters. This not only gives the book a static quality, but it also leads to the accumulation of so much superfluous detail that the main outlines become confused. On an early page the author gets Katherine of Aragon on to a ship:

> In the hot month of August, 1501, a solemn little Spanish girl took ship at Corunna, to be married into an English family.
>
> The circumstances were peculiar. The girl was not yet sixteen years of age, she did not know a word of French or English, and the only personal impression she had of the boy she was to marry was gained from a small and woodenish portrait. It was true that from the age of twelve he had written her love letters. That is to say, his tutor had written them for him. Composed in Latin, they were full of sonorous words and round appropriate sentiments. The girl had spelled them out for herself, since she had been brought up to study Latin. She had responded in the same high strain, and now she was being shipped by her father and her mother to marry the youth across the sea. Peasant girls have still sometimes this fate in the twentieth century.

The frequent lack of progress in Hackett's *Henry VIII* is

unfortunate, but not pernicious as is another fault. He describes, again with unnecessary particularity, a dress made for Anne Boleyn, and proceeds:

> The frail skeleton of Anne that was disinterred in 1876—how very different it must have appeared in its fleshly whiteness, and the fleshly whiteness in this inhuman black resplendency! As her headdress was scintillant above her black hair, and her black eyes alive with strange fire; as those quick hands expressed themselves in their transparent ivory against the voluminous deeps of her cloak; as her cloak fell from her shoulders and those fine and sinuous arms freed themselves from the rippling waterfalls of satin; as the stones with which Henry had decked her flashed into the dense and perfumed air with spiteful green and frosty blue and dizzying white and fires as red as serpent's eyes, each gesture a sibilant cataract of tumbling ebony and a play of living sparkle—the hot heart that throbbed in Henry's great body, the flood that was dammed in him, must have surged at this intimate vision of sable and snow. Anne's body, svelte and white, half-sheathed in this ostentation of voluptuous blackness—how it must have gathered itself for Henry into its one quiver of human colour—the poppy-red lips!

Here is Hollywood diction and the Hollywood mentality invading literature—an invasion that must be opposed so long as breath and ink endure.

To America may safely be left the duty of writing the epitaph on recent American biography:

> Unless readers become more critical in their choice of biographers, the newly revived taste for the most humane among all kinds of reading may die of surfeit. Anyone with spare time and access to a public library can now publish a biography. . . . Most, but not all, of these books have some excuse for being, since American history needed more attention. But if we should list in addition the hundreds of 'studies' and biographical sketches of well-known figures—many of which are merest rehashes of earlier sources—the approach of this art toward the margin of futility would begin to be evident.[1]

[1] The (New York) *Saturday Review of Literature*, Nov. 2nd, 1929, p. 337.

Nothing else in post-War literature had been so unfortunate as that biography should have oscillated persistently between dullness and vulgar smartness, after Lytton Strachey had shown how it could be illumined by a writer who brought to biography the gifts of irony, wit, taste, and intelligence.

CHAPTER IX

RECREATIONS: HUMOUR AND HORROR

§ 1.—*The Apotheosis of the Thriller*

ELDER connoisseurs are able to remember the time when it was possible to say, with complacent knowingness, that good detective novels could be counted on the fingers of one hand. In those days detective fiction was read only by the best people and the worst, but in the mid-twenties (following the production of Edgar Wallace's *The Ringer* at a London theatre) the Great British Public surged into the hitherto exclusive circle of instructed crime-students. Happily, there is a means of checking this invasion. If it can be broadcast to the multitude that the thriller, far from being new and disreputable, has a long and honourable ancestry—that it belongs, in fact, to 'good literature'—the crowd will surge back and the *status quo* will be restored. Dedicated to this good end, the following paragraphs may serve as the outline for an inaugural lecture in the future from the Sherlock Holmes Chair of Thrill Fiction at a suburban university:

'. . . The Thriller, as many of you are aware, ladies and gentlemen, is as old as Greek tragedy. Kept healthily alive during the Middle Ages in the English ballads, it came to maturity in Elizabethan drama. Undoubtedly, Shakespeare—despising (as Edgar Wallace also does) the parsimony of intellectualist writers—wrote *Hamlet* as a means of demonstrating that crime and detection and ghosts and marvels could be combined in a single work, together with the necessary additional apparatus of psychological subtlety,

Freudian complexes, sexual problems, and prosodic variation. Hamlet was the first amateur detective in literature, and the most scrupulous and painstaking. He distrusted circumstantial, inferential, and supernatural evidence, and declined to take extreme measures until the suspect could be caught red-handed in a further crime.

'After Shakespeare, the standard of the thriller declined. In the hands of Webster, Tourneur, and Otway subtlety gave way to crude violence or, at best, to mere poetic splendour; while little more can be said of the late eighteenth-century "tale of terror" school—Walpole, Mrs. Radcliffe, Monk Lewis, and Maturin. Yet these writers did at least recognize, what so many later disciples have not suspected, that the business of the thriller is to thrill. If Mrs. Radcliffe and her contemporaries no longer thrill *us*, it is simply that their eighteenth-century machinery is now rusty and old-fashioned. Wilkie Collins (in *The Moonstone*—still accounted the classic nineteenth-century thriller—and *The Woman in White*), Dickens, and Sheridan le Fanu upheld the tradition, and made the path smooth for the coming of Conan Doyle, who established modern English detective fiction (with hints, here and there, from Edgar Allen Poe and Gaboriau).

'Since with the birth of Sherlock Holmes this brief historical survey reaches a period, we may now turn aside for a few moments to take account of other factors which should properly be considered in any study of the foundations upon which rests the twentieth-century thriller.

'Morally, the thriller can be justified without difficulty. Undoubtedly it provides an indispensable safety-valve for many of the anti-social influences at work in our modern civilization. It enables men and women to commit their crimes vicariously and on a plane where no obvious penalties are imposed. The more heinous the crime, the greater the social value of the book, since it is clearly a better service

that humanity should be enabled by proxy to manage its murders (and without harm either to the potential victim or the potential criminal) than merely to rob banks or to foment political conspiracies.

'Ghost-stories, it need hardly be said, appeal to that lingering sense of the supernatural from which few of us entirely escape, however cultured we may be; a lingering sense which manifests itself in many ways, ranging from spiritualist séances to newspaper discussions on *Where Does the Soul Go?*

'It should be recognized by those who deplore the widespread taste for thrillers, that not only the physical dietary but also the intellectual dietary must be varied if the ideal of *mens sana in corpore sano* is to be attained. If we should be asked, *Why read trash when masterpieces abound?* let us answer (neglecting the unfounded imputation laid against the thriller), *Man cannot live by masterpieces alone!* That will be a bad day for readers when literary self-consciousness entirely overspreads the thriller as it threatens to do nowadays. Let us, with impassioned determination, resist every tendency to civilize the thriller. Let us have, not only "bigger and better murders", but, also, let our adventuresses be more seductive and more svelte, and our Greek and Armenian criminals more sinister and sallow.

'It is true enough, as has been said, that the thriller has an honourable ancestry and has adorned our literature with great works; it is a fact that, at the present time, a thriller may occasionally chance by happy accident to be good literature; but to attempt to bring the thriller into subjection to canons of criticism and who knows what else, would be to impose unwarranted restraints upon the free exercise of inventive genius and, in a word, intolerably to cramp the writer's style. Exaggeration, faulty logic, incredibility—these must be allowed to every manufacturer

of thrillers—for what could display a greater measure of exaggeration, what could be less logical or more incredible, than the true stories of crime provided for us with such selfless devotion and at such vast expense by the more enterprising section of the Sunday Press ? . . .'

§ 2.—*Detective Fiction*

Few would care to go all the way with the professor in his declaration of independence for those who write thrillers, but on some points he is sound. The thriller and particularly the crime and detection variety is (and should be allowed to remain) a literary wilding. If it becomes civilized and cultivated we shall have to take it seriously, whereas the chief pleasure we can get from it is entirely boy-like. We can recognize the wild variety as part of an enormously amusing game, which ought to be played by the reader according to quite absurd rules. We know the characters are puppets, though it is fun to pretend they are human. Anyone who takes up a detective story should be ready for thrills and mystification. Could Charles Lamb have lived in the nineteen-twenties he would have made Elia voice his abomination of that human species, scarcely to be called man, which approaches thrillers with a vile sleuth-like tread, intent to trip up and catch at the author on his twenty-seventh page. Not only do such anti-men (and anti-women, too) 'know who did it' in the first half-hour, but they are always right. It is against such as these that a Thrillers' Charter should be directed, with minor penalties specified for guessing and major penalties for guessing rightly. (Who can endure those detestable children who always know—as every post-War child does—exactly how everything works—and not only knows but explains ?) Detective stories should be read with constant polite inattention, so that when the author produces his solution (however superfluous or unconvincing

to the anti-man) the reader may be able to exclaim with well-bred admiration and amazement, 'Really!'

Thrillers should be allotted a reservation outside the main camp of 'serious literature'. We should demand only that the writers use a straightforward vigorous English style, and that, if they write detective stories, they also, on their part, should observe a few elementary rules. This might be called the Readers' Charter, and a draft is appended:

(i) *Love interest must be subordinate to the main crime. The entire absence of love interest will earn special credit.*

Insistence on this very necessary first principle would require considerable strength of mind, since it deals a heavy blow at many of Edgar Wallace's otherwise admirable works.

(ii) *The narrator shall not himself (herself) be the perpetrator of the crime.*

Agatha Christie has broken this rule in a book which shall not be named here; to give its title at this moment would spoil it for new readers. She is, at her best, among the very good.

(iii) *The criminal shall not be* (a) *a pretty girl, or* (b) *any other character for whom the reader's sympathies have been invoked. The criminal should be, all through, a 'wrong 'un', however much the fact is masked.*

Principal offender: A. E. W. Mason in *The House of the Arrow*, which would (apart from this blemish) deserve full marks at any crime club.

Minor Offenders: (under (*b*) chiefly) Edgar Wallace and most other detective-story writers, at one time or other.

(iv) *Apparent policemen not to be actual criminals; nor apparent criminals actual policemen.*

Loyalty forbids the naming of any offender under this clause.

(v) *Neither the identity of the criminal nor the details of the crime to be 'given away' at the beginning.*

Working on the theory that readers are more attracted by the unravelling than by the mystification, Austin Freeman sometimes admits the reader to the whole secret at an early stage. Interesting but not thrilling.

(vi) *Tunnels, secret chambers, and extra doors (particularly to large safes) entirely prohibited.*

See under (iv) above.

(vii) *The detective, though not necessarily omniscient, must not fail to solve the mystery, except where it is solved by his rivals, colleagues, assistants, or fiancée.*

Sherlock Holmes occasionally disappoints in this connexion.

(viii) *The introduction of the criminal into a novel must not be delayed beyond the third chapter.*

During the last five years of the nineteen-twenties it would have been a full-time occupation to read all the thrillers published. Edgar Wallace has been the only writer in this department to go steadily on his way without heeding the intellectualizing movement. His inventive faculty is amazing, and he has a marvellous gift of throwing into the narrative an occasional sentence filled with sinister promise for the later pages. In his plays the dialogue is neat, the humour often delightful, and the whole construction so workmanlike that the wildest improbabilities are accepted almost without their improbability being noted. Provided that an author constructs a world in which the incredible can be made credible in relation to the economy of his particular imaginative world, he automatically releases

himself from restriction by the laws of probability which circumscribe the more realistic writer.

Austin Freeman's *Dr. Thorndyke* thrillers suffer from a slight excess of science, and though it is possible to pick up a good deal of miscellaneous information from these stories there is sometimes an information-for-information's-sake air.[1] From a differing standpoint this may appear an advantage, and, at worst, it is a small blemish on much that is thrilling and entertaining. In the *Mr. Fortune* stories H. C. Bailey combines mystery and humour with more success than could have been anticipated. Reggie Fortune's verbal felicity might be compared, at times, with P. G. Wodehouse's.

§ 3.—*The Present State of Humour*

Unless the word humour is to be accepted as a generic term connoting every department of the literature of laughter there is an obvious need to proceed to a definition before the present state of humour is considered.

For this purpose Charles Lamb may be taken as the ideal humorist. As used in connexion with his essays and letters, *humour* implies a combination of quiet laughter, wit, sympathy, pathos, and delicacy. Humour such as this is rare in post-War England—where J. M. Barrie is its chief exponent and A. A. Milne a lesser one—and it would not be over-emphatic to speak of *the decay of humour* as representing its present state in this country.

Politeness we have, on demand, but little delicacy or sympathy or pathos. Separated from Charles Lamb himself, Lamb's type of humour would probably be described as whimsical; and the present generation has little patience with whimsicality, or wry smiles, or the laughter that is close to tears: it prefers its humour without handkerchiefs.

[1] See, e.g., *The Anthropologist at Large.*

Altogether, it might be said, the modern spirit, hardened by contact with a mechanical civilization, is antipathetic to the use of humour. Its drift is toward something more astringent or more robust. If, however, the decay of humour is to some extent due to the mechanization of modern life, it is partly attributable also to modern journalistic influences (themselves a product of mechanization).

Since newspapers began to ' feature ' deliberately amusing writing in a daily column, laughter has become professionalized and its subjects standardized. It is possible to be *funny* once a day or once a week, but could anyone guarantee *humour* at regular short intervals ? Humour must find its subjects among the lasting common qualities of human nature. A daily or weekly journalist, continually searching for subjects, must rely increasingly upon occasional and superficial absurdities ; and among a dozen such journalists searching the morning papers for ' a subject ', it is not unlikely that two or three will fasten upon the same (or a related) topic. This fact has little importance until the authors collect their pieces for book-publication, but when that degree of permanence has been attained, the topics are not only stale but, by familiarity, they become monotonous also. Anyone who tries to read in bulk the published works of half-a-dozen leading comic journalists, will note with discomfort the frequent likeness of their topics. In a particular week, Oxford trousers, or night clubs, or long skirts at Ascot can be (and probably must be) made funny. But two years afterward ? . . . Already by 1930 A. P. Herbert's *Two Gentlemen of Soho* (a one-act play in the Elizabethan manner on police and night clubs, published 1927) has lost most of its point—though its delightful parodying of Shakespearean passages might keep it alive on the stage if some one would always tell the actors carefully beforehand about *that* part of the fun.

A funny writer, if his funniness is to amuse for more than a year or so, must create memorable characters to express the fun, or write in language which is in itself memorably funny. He is the more fortunate if he can do both, but to be able to do one will give him some advantage over his contemporaries.

Among present-day writers, P. G. Wodehouse is alone in creating genuinely funny people using genuinely funny language, and Bertie Wooster and Jeeves have gone on being funny for a longer time than any other characters in contemporary English fiction.[1] Their verbal resource is such that a humane philologist has written appreciatively of their contributions to the language.[2] Perfection can be recognized, even though it can rarely be analysed or explained. In their own kind, P. G. Wodehouse's stories are perfect; as perfect as, in a different kind, Lewis Carroll's and Edward Lear's. England is privileged in having a few examples in its literature of delirious fun and complete inanity, and Wodehouse's additions to this small group may serve (when temporarily we can bear to laugh no more) as a starting-point for speculation as to whether the Inane and the Absolute and the Eternal are one.

Away from the Wodehouse plane several writers claim attention. J. B. Morton's (Beachcomber's) *Mr. Thake* has so far had less than his proper due; or, at least, has not been adequately praised for the right reasons. Thake *is* gorgeously absurd, but there is also an extraordinary subtlety of presentation underlying his imbecility. He is more often the plain Englishman than most plain Englishmen will recognize. In Rachel Ferguson's *Sara Skelton* theatrical memoirs are guyed with delicious fun; and here again there

[1] The first Jeeves book was *My Man Jeeves*; the latest *Very Good, Jeeves* (1930).

[2] Prof. Ernest Weekley in the London *News-Chronicle*, July 16th, 1930.

is subtle wit and irony, particularly in the passages where Sara's shadier experiences are made evident without detail or comment.

Both in prose and verse E. V. Knox and A. A. Milne upheld the *Punch* tradition in the best style, turning daily trifles into material for laughter. This part of Milne's work has seemed less important since he earned a larger fame: first as a playwright with a delicate fancy; and then as a writer of children's books. *When We Were Very Young* gets nearer to the child mind than most other verse for children, and Christopher Robin is an addition to the Peter Pan and Alice family.

A. P. Herbert has several selves, all of them indispensable. As A. P. H. of *Punch* he has created Topsy and Mr. Haddock: the former chiefly memorable for the complete inanity of her epistolary style; the latter needing no accomplishment but to go on being Mr. Haddock. As a writer of verse, A. P. Herbert has more than once achieved humour in the full sense of the definition given a few pages back: the poem on London office-girls—*The Five-o'Clock Fairies*—is the most charming tribute ever paid to a charming, efficient, and plucky race. Herbert also helped to write entertainments for the theatre (*Riverside Nights*, etc.); and as a novelist, in addition to *The Water Gipsies*,[1] has given us one of the three or four best English War-novels, *The Secret Battle*.

[1] See *ante*, p. 103 ff.

CHAPTER X

AN INQUIRY INTO CERTAIN POPULARITIES

WE are often less honest in dispraise than in praise. Reversing our father's habit, we prefer on principle to shout against the multitude, not with it. And whatever the multitude likes, it is sometimes assumed, must be tainted with greasy breath. That may be so; but reasoned examination would be better than blank assertion.

What the critical intelligence fails to note (or finds it convenient to ignore) is that there are two popularities and two multitudes. One multitude, the larger, discovers a liking for a particular author, and lo! he is popular. How the discovery is made or how it spreads so quickly is as mysterious as the rapid passage of news among savages. Usually no assistance is given by the critics, and it must therefore be true, as some publishers hold, that talk and personal recommendation are worth more than printed reviews and paid advertisements. This particular multitude is astonishing for two reasons: the sincerity of its enjoyment; and its pathetic helplessness when confronting the bookshelves in a circulating library. An amusing game for highbrows is to observe the evolutions of borrowers in a suburban subscription library. The few men do not stay long and are dull to watch. But the women scarcely ever give any sign of being habituated to books *as* books, no matter how much they read. This book world is to them a foreign world, to be visited but not inhabited. Books are taken from the shelves according to simple principles. (i) 'I've read one of hers (his)—she's good.' (ii) Nice

titles—particularly those promising a sex interest. (iii) After reference to mysterious small pieces of grubby paper with titles scribbled thereon. And there are the others who rely upon the altogether strange recommendations of the library assistants, who are masters of skilled evasion when answering the eternal question, 'Is *this* good?' Intelligent, well-read, liberal-minded, intellectually honest people looking for a new field of social service, might usefully offer themselves to circulating-library proprietors as book-guides. But however pathetically lost this larger multitude may be among books, it has no pretences and no second-hand enthusiasms, and its popularities are founded upon genuine personal liking.

The second multitude, smaller and more fickle-minded, reads whatever happens to be praised by the critics, or chosen by book societies, or talked about at the moment. It is only entertaining in the speed with which it makes haste to depreciate an approved book that becomes popular with the larger multitude.

Any novel which secures approval by the larger multitude is almost certain to have reached a certain level of competence in story-telling, and this is the outstanding merit in nearly all best-sellers. Comparatively few novel-readers re-read, and for this reason, if no other, they develop scarcely any critical faculty. They want a good story, and that given they are content. Nor does it matter how preposterous the story, since they do not demand that novels shall be accommodated to the standards of life as they know it. On the contrary, unless the novel is different from life—romantic, more expansive, with more beauty, virility and poetic justice; more action and rhetoric; sharper contrasts of colour and light and shade—what use (to them) *is* the novel? Novel-readers do not want a criticism of life, nor a commentary on human experience; they want a way of escape from the pressure of life—from domestic cares,

children, and husbands; or from business worries, fretful parents, strap-hanging, and shilling lunches.

Why not? . . .

That laconic question is probably less trivial than its sound suggests. There is a real need for serious inquiry into *The Effect of Pseudo-Romance in Fiction and Drama on Social Dissatisfaction*, for there is more than fun behind A. P. Herbert's song:

> Jack loves me well enough, I know,
> But does he ever bite his lip,
> And does he chew his cheek to show
> That Passion's got him in a grip?
> An' does his gun go pop-pop-pop
> When fellers get familiar? No.
> He just says, ''Op it!' and they 'op—
> It may be life, but ain't it slow?[1]

—an idea beautifully and movingly expanded by the same author in *The Water Gipsies*. If the theory is true that novel-readers tend, more or less, to criticize their own dull existence in the light of glamorous pseudo-romantic fiction, in which human standards are falsified and values distorted, then such fiction is an anti-social influence. A major evil, if not a sin, is committed by those who persistently set up in fiction a romantic idea to which life does not approximate.

The British Home Office occasionally compels the withdrawal of a book because it transgresses against a certain attitude toward sexual behaviour; but it is a foolishly inadequate censorship which condones imbecility (and often suggestive imbecility). If a censorship is to exist at all, its functions should be to safeguard the immature mind against contamination by undesirable printed matter of every description. A moral nation is a nation with a high standard of behaviour, intelligence, and taste, and the

[1] 'It may be Life—': printed in both *Laughing Ann* and *Riverside Nights*.

Home Office subscribes to an appallingly depressed ideal of morality so long as it attempts to elevate our standard of sexual behaviour while at the same time allowing intelligence and taste to take their chance. If the plea of practical difficulty should be urged, we may reply that it is no harder to fix an arbitrary standard of taste and intelligence than an arbitrary standard of behaviour.

The relation between censorship and best-sellers must be evident to anyone with even a limited knowledge of what books are published and sold with impunity. This reference is not so much to the high proportion of sex novels in the seven-and-sixpenny class, as to books sold at much lower prices and circulating among those impressionable young people for whose morals the Home Office professes concern. In many instances the inflammatory promise goes no farther than the dust-cover—the purveyors excite expectations they do not satisfy, and so cheat their customers instead of debasing them. One much-displayed novel which has been in circulation for years bears some such legend as this: 'What would you do if you were alone in the desert with a sheik?' The pictorial wrapper shows a woman lying face downward, apparently unconscious, partially covered with a thin veil. In the background is a seated man in eastern costume (presumably the sheik) contemplating the woman. Neither the picture nor the question is immoral in the Home Office sense; but the bad taste and low intelligence, considered in relation to the minds of the people who read such fiction, suggest that true morality must suffer as deep and extensive injury from these sources as from any of which official cognizance is taken.

Sheik fiction is popular among adults whose physical emotions are unsatisfied to the point of starvation,[1] and

[1] It is popular also, of course, among the depraved, but they need not be considered here, since they will always nose out suitable reading matter.

among minors whose curiosity is aroused but not provided with any healthy channel of information. In both instances, therefore, the issue is pathological rather than literary; and as our civilization has nothing to propose for the emotionally starved, feebly erotic fiction will continue to find its profitable market and be a pathetic symbol.

No problem is present by Ethel M. Dell's popularity. Her books are unpretentious contributions to the literature of escape: that is, they enable the weary and bored and depressed to transfer themselves temporarily to another sphere of life. The only marvel to readers on a different mental plane is that anyone should believe the real world to be duller than the Dell world. The wit who transferred a letter from the surnames of the two women writers and called them E. M. Hell and Ethel M. Dull indicated what sensations, in the superior judgment, their works respectively suggest. But to her admirers Ethel M. Dell is thrilling—and the two points of view, though irreconcilable, should be mutually understandable. Those below a certain standard of literary culture desire, in their imaginative exercises, to move in a world as different from their own as any world can be. Girls who travel on crowded tramcars and Underground trains among hordes of plain young men, or who live in kitchens and are visited by few save plain young butchers and plain young bakers, are likely to be responsive to the emotions of a heroine carried long distances through strange romantic country by a Nick Ratcliffe; or to those of another heroine attracted by the magnetic personality of a Charles Rex in the supposed romantic atmosphere of a liner. There can be comparatively little harm in such fiction to offset the pleasure it gives, unless the readers develop a settled dissatisfaction with life because their ordinary plain young men are like neither Nick Ratcliffe nor Charles Rex. It may seem fantastic to suggest that anyone would be likely to do so, but there is a danger

that fiction-fed minds may become in time permanently depressed and disgruntled by the conviction that life has not allowed them 'a fair deal'. The remedy is not necessarily to encourage them to remain content with the state in which they have been settled by circumstance, but so to train their minds as to enable them to develop in themselves that interior personal life which is independent of circumstance and, by being thus independent, may facilitate transference to circumstances less oppressive. A fallacy and a false morality are involved in setting up a glamorous foundationless world in opposition to a real world, however drab. Good literature has its glamour and romance, often, but there is intelligence behind it, it does not violate fundamental truths of human experience, and it makes its romance from genuine living emotion and not from sham appearances.

Popular literature to-day is distinguished by two kinds of emotional dross: sentimentality—soft-shelled emotion; and cynicism—hard-shelled. They are equally undesirable emotions and equally false, for cynicism is only highbrow sentimentality. Sentimentality frankly blubbers, whereas cynicism either gulps with a sob in its throat, or parades its disillusion with a sympathy-begging sneer. Neither the cynic nor the sentimentalist is competent to view life fairly or to give a properly proportioned picture in words: the sentimentalist prettifies and over-emotionalizes; the cynic uglifies and tinges his picture of life with a pseudo-romantic bitterness. Michael Arlen and Gilbert Frankau are fertile in romantic cynicism. Both of them have written books of more than average quality. Gilbert Frankau's *Peter Jackson* was almost the first English War-novel, and when the author's personal opinions were not obtruded, it was a good one. Nothing he has done since is equal to it, and a good deal in his later novels is hectic and unsavoury. Much the same can be said of Michael Arlen's *Young Men*

in Love, and it is a pity that the immoralist label that is in many people's minds attached to him should have diverted attention from *These Charming People* and *May Fair* in which he reveals extraordinary skill as a short-story writer. But added to a little of Kipling and a little of Stevenson, there is much Arlenesque cynicism, either humorous, or strong he-man stuff, as at the end of *Consuelo Brown*:[1] 'I had seen that white look she gave that wretched boy, and that white look was like a disease in the sunlight. Lithe limbs and curling lips, laughing eyes and loose heart—a hungry girl, made to rot men.' At his occasional best, Michael Arlen is too good a story-teller to be dismissed from notice on account of his mannerisms.

No other English book during the nineteen-twenties had such an amazing popular success as A. S. M. Hutchinson's *If Winter Comes*. Despite its fantastically bad literary style it was praised by many to whom best-sellers are normally anathema. It appeared at a time following the War when the public mind was readily susceptible to such an appealing situation as Hutchinson contrived. Take (*a*) a semi-scholarly, simple-minded, semi-poetic husband; (*b*) a misunderstanding, obtuse wife, without enthusiasm or sympathy; (*c*) an 'unfortunate' attractive girl, honourably succoured by the quixotic husband; (*d*) two humorous servant girls devoted to the husband. Given this formula, a skilled novelist can confidently promise a best-seller. And when to the handling of such a formula is brought the humanitarian zeal and patent sincerity that Hutchinson brought, no further reason need be sought for the sensation stirred by *If Winter Comes*. The book has failed to outlast the decade because it was contrived according to a formula and was not generated from living experience. Mark Sabre had in him the makings of a memorable literary character, but his quixotry is carried so far as to outrage common sense

[1] In *These Charming People*.

at a second reading and sympathy veers round from the sympathetic Mark to the unsympathetic Mabel—so far as, after the first reading, it is possible to feel sympathy for anyone in a book where the emotional atmosphere is so heavily overcharged.

A good book is always better when re-read than at first reading. A novel which does not stand the test of intelligent re-reading may have been a best-seller, but it is not good literature.

CHAPTER XI

SCIENCE, RELIGION, AND MORALS

CONDUCT in the nineteenth century was founded, in a vital sense, upon the widely accepted notion that Man possessed stores of precise knowledge about matters that are, to the common mind, unknowable. The average man and the average woman in that century accepted current religious and moral standards because their pastors and masters were confidently dogmatic. Vast bodies of dogma are essential for a stable world, inasmuch as (in the limited state of development to which we have reached) a stable world depends upon the existence of some firm anchorage for unstable minds—and these constitute the majority. 'I believe . . .' is still at present the indispensable anchorage for human society.

The conflict between science and religion—possibly at bottom a fortuitous one—has been an outstanding human preoccupation for centuries past. Almost every important statement of a new scientific principle has seemed to some branch of the Christian Church to shake the foundations of religion. Actually, of course, so far as religion is Ultimate Truth, its foundations cannot be shaken by anything whatsoever. If science has repeatedly shaken the Christian Churches—a superstructure reared upon religion—it is the Churches' fault. In the Middle Ages their opposition to science was born of that tyranny which is always accompanied by timidity. In the modern world, the Churches' uneasiness about science (at present manifested in an excessive friendliness) is due to confusion of mind. Christianity stands by a fixed and final revelation, and the

Churches must decide whether they will accept the conditions imposed by that fixity, or follow science on to its ever-changing ground; and so, through an overplus of casuistry, sacrifice altogether their claim to authority. The one hope for the Churches is to abandon their attempt to run in double harness with science [1] and to declare their independence. Religion (meaning whatsoever any particular religionist intends it to mean) may live on easy terms with science; but that particular expression of religion which is Christianity is definitely attached to the Bible, and either it must remain where the Bible is and preserve its spiritual integrity; or, leaving the Bible, it may follow the scientists and remain *a* religion, but no longer Christianity. The Bible can, of course, be 'explained' in the light of modern scientific theories, but that involves the fatal process of *explaining away*—a disastrous policy upon which branches of the Protestant Church have been engaged for decades past. Such strength as the Churches may be able to recover in the present generation can only come from a reassertion of super-rational authority, based upon the claim that the Bible is the Word of God. They would then be charged with obscurantism, but if their First Postulate is sound they could afford to bear that charge with equanimity. When Whitehead says that 'religion will not regain its old power until it can face change in the same spirit as does science',[2] he is considering religion without that special element of divine revelation which inheres in Christianity, and which demands a particular measure of faith. Only enfeebled minds and anaemic souls require that the firmament of faith shall pass through the grass-stalk of reason. Though, among the stronger, many are content with the grass-stalk alone.

The gradual and serious weakening of dogma throughout

[1] No such attempt has been made, of course, by the Roman Church.
[2] *Science and the Modern World*, Ch. XII, p. 234 (1929 edn.).

the last half-century apprised the average man and woman, by degrees, that where certainty had previously seemed to be absolute, all manner of 'laws' were now called in question. It had been common knowledge that a great deal of uncertainty existed in the religious world, but, even so, there remained the impression that moral laws—and the modes of conduct ordered thereby—still had some inviolable foundation. The effect of the War in partially effacing that impression is too notorious to require emphasis. A further (and perhaps, unconsciously, the final) influence in causing post-War ideas of conduct to become entirely fluid, was the slow percolation to the popular mind of the news that science, also, was very much in doubt about itself.[1] For some not very obvious reason, the plain man was convinced that science meant *facts* in their final and unshakable form, and that scientists dealt only and all the time in exact knowledge. In the background of his mind was the confidence that though religion and morals might totter, science would stand firm. For half a century he had been accustomed to believe or to fear, according to his point of view, that when religion and science conflicted, science was right. Science, he thought, *knew*: religion only *trusted*.

Then, after the War, the plain man began to hear of Einstein and Relativity. Naturally, he has not in general fathomed what relativity is 'all about'; but the desire to 'keep abreast', even of Einstein, caused the plain man to read much popularized science, and he made one discovery which (though accepted as a natural commonplace by scientists) was to the plain man revolutionary. He discovered, but did not crystallize in this epigram, that 'science

[1] 'Nowadays whenever enthusiasts meet together to discuss theoretical physics the talk sooner or later turns in a certain direction. You leave them conversing on their special problems or the latest discoveries; but return after an hour and it is any odds that they will have reached an all-engrossing topic—the desperate state of their ignorance'.—A. S. Eddington, *The Nature of the Physical World*, Ch. IX, p. 179.

is the continuous discovery of its own mistakes'.[1] He was told, on the authority of one of the foremost present-day scientists, that

> The note of the present epoch is that so many complexities have developed regarding material, space, time, and energy, that the simple security of the old orthodox assumptions has vanished. . . . The eighteenth century opened with the quiet confidence that at last nonsense had been got rid of. To-day we are at the opposite pole of thought. Heaven knows what seeming nonsense may not to-morrow be demonstrated truth.[2]

The plain man had already felt within himself that he was not so plain as he had formerly been led to believe. Might not he himself be among the 'many complexities' of the present epoch? Might not his complexity be a different complexity from that of his neighbour? And if so, were the Grand Simple Verities, as a rule of life, fully, invariably, and equally serviceable to himself, his neighbour, and the rest of mankind? If 'material, space, time, and energy' were no longer governed by the old orthodox assumptions, why should *he* continue to be governed without further inquiry by the old orthodox beliefs and prohibitions? He learned that scientists set up a hypothesis and then, through experiment, endeavour to justify it. If the hypothesis does not work they abandon it; they formulate their principles according to a system of trial and error. Philosophers likewise: it is their function 'to harmonize, refashion, and justify divergent intuitions as to the nature of things'.[3]

Though neither a physicist nor a metaphysician, the plain man (particularly the plain young man, and more particularly the plain young woman) was directly or indirectly persuaded by 'the spirit of the age' to adopt a

[1] Gerald Gould: *Week-end Review*, July 12th, 1930, p. 46.
[2] A. N. Whitehead: op. cit., Ch. VII, pp. 142, 143.
[3] Ibid., Preface, p. ix.

new creed: *I believe in the uncertainty of all things. I believe that all things are possible, nothing incredible. I believe in myself as the closest manifestation—however irrational, imperfect, unsatisfactory—of reality. I believe that life is for free speculation and experiment, world without end.*

The atom, aether, light, and matter no longer stand where they did. Two and two only doubtfully make four; parallel lines may in some circumstances meet. 'The frank realization that physical science is concerned with a world of shadows is one of the most significant of recent advances.'[1] When such reports and rumours run through to lively (even if unscientific) minds over a whole generation relentlessly eager to absorb ideas, repercussions in the sphere of conduct are inevitable.

The impression must not be created, however, that the foremost scientists of the nineteen-twenties encouraged unorthodoxy in belief and conduct. Eddington distinguishes between physics as *symbolic knowledge* (based upon mathematical symbols or formulae) and *intimate knowledge* ('unamenable to metrical specification')[2] which relates to the 'spiritual substratum'[3] of mental consciousness. There is to him nothing antagonistic between modern science, which 'can grasp the tune but not the player', and mystical religion, which is 'the most personal relationship of all—that of the human soul to the divine spirit'.[4] Whitehead, less mystical, nevertheless recognizes that 'religion is the expression of one type of fundamental experiences of mankind',[5] and considers the worship of God as 'an adventure of the spirit, a flight after the unattainable'. 'The death of religion,' he adds, 'comes with the repression of the high hope of adventure.'

'The high hope of adventure.' If religion lies that way,

[1] A. S. Eddington: *The Nature of the Physical World*, Introduction.
[2] Ibid., Ch. XV, pp. 321–3.
[3] Ibid., Ch. XIII, p. 282.
[4] Ibid., Ch., XV, p. 341.
[5] Ibid., Ch. XII, p. 236.

religionists should be happy about the outlook. Since the sixteenth century, youth has never been so adventurous as it is to-day; and most of the maladies of this generation are due to limited opportunities for adventure. Aviation is for the very few, and even if it were not, the conquest of the air promises only limited thrills. The pursuit of material success has had its day. What adventure, then, that beckons to present-day youth can have any hope of outbidding the high excitement of *experimentation with Life*?—'the fight against the effort to force him into a mould, the eager searching out for life and more life which will respond to the spark of life within'.[1] Philippics are worthless from moralists who fail to take account of young people's conviction nowadays that they do not mind going to hell—or to heaven—if only they can go in their own way.[2] Whether or no this is bravado, it is not to be frowned or shouted away, nor dismissed with the sweep of a moral arm. Before 1914, a-morality was usually no more than a negative yielding to fleshly desire, but since the War a good deal of what the moralist loosely calls 'loose behaviour' is in response to an *a-moral conviction*—let it be called that rather than a 'new morality'. However lopsided it may be that the idea of morality should be primarily associated with sexual behaviour, there is no doubt that the setting-up of a new standard of emotional and physical relations between men and women is the popular symbol of moral revolt. Consequently, marriage has become, as it were, the battle-ground for the campaign between *moral conviction* and *a-moral conviction*.[3] The question of 'To marry or not to marry' can be left out of account, as the main conflict is *within* the borders of marriage. In this struggle the

[1] Richard Aldington: *Death of a Hero*, Pt. I, § 4.

[2] See ibid.

[3] A detached spectator might prefer the non-committal terms 'moral conviction *a*' and 'moral conviction *b*', since both parties profess that theirs is true morality.

amoralists hold the weapon of contraception, which enables them (*a*) to controvert the Pauline[1] and prayer-book doctrines concerning the primary purpose of marriage; (*b*) to assert that 'reason is, undoubtedly, the servant of the passions'; [2] and (*c*) to declare 'that sex-love between man and woman' is a mutual desire and not always wholly masculine, and that 'it is the experience of modern women that sex is an instinctive need to them as it is to men'.[3] The conviction that the right ordering, mutual adjustment, and full development of the physical love-life between husband and wife is the first principle of happy marriage, is the basis of current amorality.[4] By this the amoralists do not mean that there should be complete abandonment to animal passion. Quite otherwise. To them love is an art with subtle principles to be mastered, not a casual affair into which any clodhopper and feather-brain can blunder with ignorance and success. They assert that for the physical love-life to be rightly ordered and fully developed important mental and spiritual adjustments are indispensable. They deplore the dualism (trialism, rather) which still strives to departmentalize body, mind, and spirit. They desire to substitute a monism (or holism) which will bring all three into a single harmony to express the whole-power of man and woman. Whereas the Old Moralists set spirit first, as the dominant partner who must rule the other two with the body in subjection, the New Amoralists regard the culminating emotion of physical love as a flame which can burn with clear and cleansing intensity only when *all* the

[1] 1 Corinthians vii, verses 1–9, etc.

[2] Naomi Mitchison: *Comments on Birth Control*, p. 5.

[3] Dora (Mrs. Bertrand) Russell: *Hypatia: or Woman and Knowledge*, pp. 32, 41.

[4] In what follows I am not summarizing any one writer's theory nor seeking to formulate my own. I have tried to express what seems to me to be some of the general ideas implicit in the new outlook. The terms Old Moralist and New Amoralist are merely convenient labels. —A. C. W.

faculties of the lovers are actively and completely adjusted. Under such conditions, it is held, the exultancy of physical love is not simply an end in itself (though in itself it can be a source of passionate ecstasy and delight), but also and more importantly the way to that peace and understanding which are the beginning of wisdom in marriage. They believe, not less than the Old Moralists did, in the value of self-control and reasonable continence, but they refuse to regard sex as the 'old Adam' whose submission to control must be secured either by the bribe of occasional shamefaced indulgence or through absent-minded mechanical habitude.

How is contraception concerned in this?

Altogether apart from considerations of economy, women's health and children's welfare, the New Amoralists contest the traditional idea which envisaged marriage as mainly a series of domestic and extra-domestic activities—home, family, society, church. In the newer view, marriage is a personal relationship between a man and a woman to secure the highest happiness of the two in unison; and it is held that only through the attainment of such happiness can the two make their full and unfettered contribution to the welfare and happiness of others. The sex-relation is a paradox; for though it is mystical in its moments of full intensity, and in those moments gives perfect release from the earth-pull of the body,[1] the mystical experience cannot be partaken except through the willing and desired apprehension of bodily delight,[2] which in its turn can only be perfectly known when the mind and spirit and blood of both the man and the woman are attuned. This experience, in the amoralist view, constitutes true marriage, and true

[1] So far as I am aware, the only attempt to translate into words this incommunicable experience is in D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

[2] 'Love should be a tree whose roots are deep in the earth, but whose branches extend into heaven.'—Bertrand Russell: *Marriage and Morals*, Ch. XIX, p. 224.

marriage is achieved anew at each renewal of the experience. Its end is peace in the deepest sense; and a child is its perfect symbol. But to declare, as some moralists still do, that married lovers shall not seek peace at that source except for the procreation of children, is to consider marriage as no more than an institution for breeding. Occasional recourse to contraception is implicit in the new view of marriage, but no sensible or sensitive person claims that it is more than an unsatisfactory expedient to be countenanced temporarily until knowledge in these matters increases: 'Contraception, in spite of our propagandists, is not a particularly beautiful or ennobling subject. It is only . . . a compromise, and all compromises are by nature uninspiring and un-universal. Yet there it is; our happiness is, as a matter of fact, too deeply affected by it for us to pretend not to be interested.' [1]

An immediate and unfortunate consequence of popular acquaintance with contraceptive methods and devices has been a violent slackening of moral discipline among the young.[2] This, though far from negligible, is probably a passing phase (for marriage will not be superseded) and nothing can be proved from it unless equal attention is given to the number of unhappy and disastrous marriages contracted within the bounds of orthodox morality. Contraception must, at any rate, be judged upon other grounds than these; otherwise it might be argued that religion should be prohibited because it sometimes provokes melancholia and mania in adolescents. Temporary outbursts of licence are the price exacted for periods of undue repression. The New Amoralists would readily acknowledge

[1] Naomi Mitchison: op. cit., p. 31.

[2] Evidence of this has been collected more assiduously in America than in England (see Judge Lindsey's *Revolt of Modern Youth* and *The Companionate Marriage*; and Collinson Owen's *The American Illusion*, pp. 8 off.); but the slackening has probably been proportionate, though less demonstrative, in this country.

that their ideal is one which, under modern industrial pressure upon mind and body, is likely to be attained by comparatively few. For the majority, however, there is an alternative view advocated by Bertrand Russell[1]: namely, that 'sex is a natural human need like food and drink'. Only a negligible minority of abnormal people eat more than is good for them; they observe a rational self-discipline at the table. The belief is growing that if sex is released from unnatural restraints, taboos, and inhibitions it will fall into place among other natural instincts and demand no more than its normal place in human affairs.

> The general principle upon which the newer morality differs from the traditional morality of Puritanism is this: we believe that instinct should be trained rather than thwarted. . . . Most traditionalist moralists appear to think that, if our sexual impulses were not severely checked, they would become trivial, anarchic and gross. I believe this view to be derived from observation of those who have acquired the usual inhibitions from their early years, and have subsequently attempted to ignore them. . . . Most men and women, as things stand, are incapable of being as whole-hearted and as generous in the love that they bring to marriage as they would be if their early years had been less hedged about with taboos.[2]

Moralists, and average sensible people also, frequently declare that reformers assign an exaggerated importance to sexual problems, and that the world would get along very well if everything were allowed to go on without interference or fuss according to the old orthodox moral code. If this is so, there is presumably no reason why anyone should feel disturbed by the high rate of nervous disorders among women; by the frequency of boredom and unhappiness in marriage; by the prevalence of prostitution, both professional and amateur; by the eroticism of much contemporary

[1] Bertrand Russell: *Marriage and Morals.*
[2] Ibid., Ch. XXI, pp. 242, 244, 246.

fiction; or by that 'low standard of morality among young people' alleged by the moralists themselves.

What is the remedy for these disorders? As of old, some say one thing, some another. Over against Bertrand Russell's liberalism can be set Dean Inge's conservatism [1]; between the two, Walter Lippmann's [2] reasoned examination of the moral situation from many angles, with a personal leaning toward humanism. No remedy can be prescribed unless the disorder and the cause are understood. The younger generation to-day is very like the middle generation, except in one particular. The middle generation just managed to reach years of discretion before the War-time upheaval; such character as that generation had was already stabilized; if it had thrown overboard the old orthodoxies it had, also, discovered its own alternative orthodoxy—*self-discipline*. All that Walter Lippmann expresses by 'humanism', 'high religion', 'aristocratic principle', 'virtue' is postulated in the idea of 'self-discipline'. He quotes from the *Analects* of the aged Confucius: 'I could follow what my heart desired, without transgressing what was right'—which again is self-discipline, the freedom to follow and indulge personal desire because character has been trained to desire only those things which it conceives to be right and proper for a good life. A dangerous doctrine for unstable minds—though unstable minds could no more justify a profession of the doctrine than a hypocrite can justify lip-service to Christianity. Through the necessity imposed by divorce from the old 'certainties' the middle generation secured itself to the firm anchorage of self-discipline. The younger generation grew up in a world too preoccupied with international

[1] *Christian Ethics and Modern Problems*, etc.

[2] *A Preface to Morals*. Not the least welcome feature of this valuable book is its proper use of the word *morals* to cover the whole field of modern inquiry.

suicide to suggest to its children the necessity for any anchorage.

What most distinguishes the generation who have approached maturity since the *débâcle* of idealism at the end of the War is not their rebellion against the religion and the moral code of their parents, but their disillusion with their own rebellion. It is common for young men and women to rebel, but that they should rebel sadly and without faith in their own rebellion, that they should distrust the new freedom no less than the old certainties—that is something of a novelty.[1]

The alternatives open to the younger generation are several: utter materialism; a return to institutional religion (as a refuge which may at least give rest); superstition, in one or another of its modern manifestations; the ideal of personal discipline and disinterestedness in business, government, and sexual relations—commended by Lippmann.[2] But that ideal, as he sees, must be inculcated through education, and is therefore likely to miss the younger generation which has passed beyond the more impressionable years of tutelage.

Is there then no remedy? There seems to be none to which the younger generation is drawn.

In the grey intervals in the life of the modern young, one fact emerges in all its dreariness, and makes itself plain to the young themselves, as well as to the onlooker. The fact that they are empty: that they care about nothing and nobody; not even the amusement they seek so strenuously. . . .

The love of humanity is gone, leaving a great gap. The cosmic consciousness has collapsed upon a great void. The egoist sits grinning furtively in the triumph of his own emptiness. And now what is woman going to do? Now that the house of life is empty, now that she's thrown all the emotional furnishing out of the window, and the house of life, which is her eternal home, is empty as a tomb, now what is dear forlorn woman going to do? [3]

[1] *A Preface to Morals*, Part I, Ch. I, § iv, p. 17.

[2] Ibid., III, II, § iv.

[3] D. H. Lawrence: *Nobody Loves Me. Life and Letters*, July, 1930, p. 46.

This picture might seem to be too dark if it were not that there is a cloud of witnesses to confirm it with independent testimony. But with the middle generation it is different: for

> . . . the mature man would take the world as it comes, and within himself remain quite unperturbed. . . . Since nothing gnawed at his vitals, neither doubt nor ambition, nor frustration, nor fear, he would move easily through life. And so whether he saw the thing as comedy, or high tragedy, or plain farce, he would affirm that it is what it is, and that the wise man can enjoy it.[1]

Meanwhile, perhaps, the younger generation may find refuge and a place of contemplation in the new wonderland opened up by pure science, where nothing is what it appears to be; where 'when we stand on the ground the molecules of the ground support us by hammering on the soles of our boots with force equivalent to some ten stone weight. But for this we should sink through the interstices of the floor.'[2] In spite of the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of making the new scientific ideas intelligible to the lay mind, present-day scientists have succeeded, beyond question, in making modern physics seem great fun. The verbal illustrations used by Eddington to illustrate the Fitzgerald contraction, Einstein's new law of gravity, and so on, have the valuable effect of bringing science into literature, instead of permitting it to linger in a barren waste of technical jargon. In addition to being an eminent physicist, Eddington is also a better literary artist than some who are primarily men of letters. His frank admission of the limitations of scientific knowledge, and the lightness and charming allusiveness of his style, are illustrated in this passage:

> *Something unknown is doing we don't know what*—that is what our theory amounts to. It does not sound a particularly illuminating theory. I have read something like it elsewhere—

[1] Lippmann, op. cit., concluding paragraph.
[2] Eddington, op. cit., Ch. VI, p. 113.

The slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe.

. . . To contemplate electrons circulating in the atom carries us no further; but by contemplating eight circulating electrons in one atom and seven circulating electrons in another we begin to realize the difference between oxygen and nitrogen. Eight slithy toves gyre and gimble in the oxygen wabe; seven in nitrogen. By admitting a few numbers even 'Jabberwocky' may become scientific.

The plain man, overlooking for the moment that the pursuit of exact knowledge and truth is its own justification, will often ask the scientist, 'What *use* is all this?' It is often difficult to answer this question without an appeal to faith; but at least one scientific treatise published in the nineteen-twenties will seem even to the plain man to have a special significance—J. W. Dunne's *An Experiment with Time*, which may in the future be accepted as marking an epoch. The subject dealt with can best be introduced indirectly through a quotation in which the author asks:

What about that curious feeling which almost every one has now and then experienced—that sudden, fleeting, disturbing conviction that something which is happening at that moment *has happened before*?[1]

This experience is probably so general that any plausible suggested explanation will excite interest. Dunne found that at various times (observed over an extended period) he dreamed of happenings which later actually 'came to pass'. Later and more exact observations satisfied him that dreams are in part a mirror of events *still to come*. Stated thus, away from its proper framework of recorded experiment, the theory seems wildly fantastic, but scepticism breaks down in face of the evidence set forth (and taken from a number of independent observers); while sections of the book devoted to mathematical data yield further support

[1] P. 53.

free from the element of possible human self-deception. The scientific explanation advanced has its basis in the concept of Time as serial and multidimensional, and Dunne is satisfied that an affirmative answer must be given to the questions he posited at a certain stage of his inquiry. Could it be, he asked,

> . . . that the universe was, after all, really stretched out in Time, and that the lopsided view we had of it—a view with the 'future' part unaccountably missing, cut off from the growing 'past' by a travelling 'present moment'—was due to a purely mentally imposed barrier which existed only when we were awake? [1]

Investigation along this line is enhanced in interest by the author's further theory that we always dream when we sleep, and that '"dreamless" sleep is an illusion of memory'. And if 'future' events already have their existence in the Time series, what becomes of free-will? *An Experiment with Time* faces this problem and allows the continuance of belief in the free-will principle by stating the theory of personal *intervention*, though with the qualification that 'in the sort of life led by the average civilized man, intervention has seldom any very great effect in altering future experience'.

[1] P. 54.

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